

RECOGNIZING THE VALUE OF ADJUNCT FACULTY IN THE TWO - YEAR COLLEGE:
A COMPREHENSIVE FRAMEWORK FOR LEADERSHIP, PEDAGOGY, AND
INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

RECOGNIZING THE VALUE OF ADJUNCT FACULTY IN THE TWO - YEAR COLLEGE: A COMPREHENSIVE FRAMEWORK FOR LEADERSHIP, PEDAGOGY, AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

Jennifer Burke Grehan, MA, MEd

Adjunct faculty now constitute the majority of instructors in American higher education, particularly in two-year colleges, yet they often work under precarious conditions that undermine both their well-being and student success. This dissertation examines how contingent employment structures, limited access to governance, and uneven professional development opportunities create a two-tiered faculty system that disproportionately affects gateway and developmental courses serving first-generation, multilingual, low-income, and neurodiverse students. Drawing on national data and my experience as an adjunct instructor in multiple two-year colleges since 2013 and as a department chair for the past two years, the study argues that adjunct equity is not a peripheral labor issue but a central concern for institutional integrity, educational quality, and social justice.

The project responds to this challenge through the design of the Adjunct Governance and Teaching Toolkit, a practice-based resource that synthesizes research on contingent labor, shared governance, distributed leadership, and high-impact teaching with lived experience in the two-year college system. Organized around governance and leadership, professional development, and inclusive teaching practices, the toolkit provides adaptable tools that help institutions examine existing structures, center adjunct voices, and pilot more equitable models

of participation and support. Core strategies include micro-leadership opportunities for adjunct faculty, communities of practice that cross employment categories, and flexible, compensated professional development designed around adjunct schedules and responsibilities.

By linking institutional practices to student outcomes and demonstrating how adjunct faculty can serve as leaders and agents of change, the dissertation offers a concrete framework for colleges seeking to move from rhetorical commitments to equity toward coordinated, actionable reform. The Adjunct Governance and Teaching Toolkit is proposed as one pathway for two-year colleges to align labor practices, governance structures, and professional learning with their stated missions of access, inclusion, and student success.

DEDICATION

To my children, Lucy and William,

Whose laughter, kindness, and strength kept me moving forward even on the longest days. You motivate me more than you know. Every day you remind me why this work matters and what it means to show up with heart, again and again.

To Sean,

You are my partner, teammate, and constant “you got this!” Thank you for every pep talk, every extra load you carried, and every moment you believed in this project and me when I was too tired to.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAUP – AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS

APA – American Psychological Association

ASAP – Accelerated Study in Associate Programs

CLA – Critical Language Awareness

CLT – Communicative Language Teaching

CoP – Community of Practice

CRT – Critical Race Theory

CTL – Center for Teaching and Learning

ELL – English Language Learner

ESL – English as a Second Language

FLC – Faculty Learning Community

GED – General Educational Development

HSI – Hispanic-Serving Institution

LMS – Learning Management System

PD – Professional Development

SAMHSA – Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

UDL – Universal Design for Learning

USM – University System of Maryland

GLOSSARY

Adjunct Faculty

Part-time or contingent instructors employed on limited-term contracts who teach a significant proportion of courses in two-year colleges and universities, often with uneven access to benefits, stability, governance participation, and institutional resources.

Adjunct Equity

Institutional practices and policies that align adjunct faculty working conditions, access, compensation, and voice with the centrality of their instructional role, framing adjunct inclusion as a matter of student success, educational quality, and institutional integrity rather than as a peripheral labor issue.

Adjunct Governance and Teaching Toolkit

A practice-based collection of tools, routines, templates, and participation pathways designed to make adjunct inclusion feasible, visible, and repeatable across governance, professional learning, curriculum design, pedagogy, and assessment.

Aggregated Data

Data that have been compiled and summarized across individuals, sections, courses, or programs in order to identify patterns and trends while protecting individual identities. In this dissertation, aggregated data are used as a tool for institutional learning and equity analysis rather than individual evaluation, enabling faculty and leaders to examine structural conditions, instructional coherence, and student outcomes across contexts.

Asset-Based Pedagogy

An instructional approach that centers the linguistic, cultural, experiential, and intellectual resources students and faculty bring to learning environments, shifting

institutional narratives from deficit and remediation toward capability, contribution, and value.

Assessment as Inquiry

A collaborative assessment approach in which faculty jointly frame questions, examine aggregated student work and outcomes, interpret evidence, and plan instructional or structural change, emphasizing learning and improvement rather than compliance or surveillance.

Benign Neglect

A working condition described by some instructors as being “left alone” to teach without interference, which can feel like autonomy but often functions as structural abandonment when paired with isolation, lack of information, and exclusion from decision-making processes.

Community Cultural Wealth

A framework that identifies multiple forms of capital (such as linguistic, familial, social, navigational, aspirational, and resistant capital) held by students and communities that are often unrecognized or undervalued in higher education institutions.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

A language-teaching approach that emphasizes authentic communication and interaction, treating language learning as a process of negotiating meaning in real contexts rather than as the mastery of isolated grammatical rules.

Concertive Action

Collective capacity, generated when individuals pool initiative, expertise, and effort through shared routines and artifacts, producing outcomes that exceed what isolated work can accomplish.

Contingent Labor

Employment arrangements characterized by short-term contracts, variable workload, limited job

security, and uneven access to institutional resources and governance, shaping both faculty well-being and instructional conditions.

Critical Language Awareness (CLA)

A framework for examining how language norms, policies, and judgments distribute power and legitimacy, and for designing pedagogy that promotes linguistic access, asset recognition, and student agency.

Distributed Leadership

A conception of leadership as practice produced through interactions among people, tools, routines, and contexts rather than authority located solely in formal roles, emphasizing how influence and action are made possible in everyday institutional work.

Equity-Minded Practice

Decision-making that explicitly examines how institutional structures and practices produce unequal outcomes and uses evidence, including aggregated data, to redesign policies and routines that widen access, reduce hidden barriers, and support belonging and success

Gateway Courses

High-enrollment, high-stakes entry courses that strongly influence student persistence and progression; in two-year colleges, these courses are frequently taught by adjunct faculty.

Governance Mapping

A diagnostic process that identifies where decisions are made, who participates, how information and aggregated data circulate, and how institutional priorities move, or fail to move, into classroom practice.

Hidden Rules (Institutional Navigation)

Unspoken expectations about academic norms, processes, and systems that advantage students with insider knowledge unless they are taught explicitly.

Interest-Based Negotiation

A collaborative approach to decision-making that shifts attention from fixed positions to underlying interests and shared goals, supporting more durable and equitable agreements.

Linguistic Justice

An equity framework that recognizes language as inseparable from power, identity, and access, and seeks to ensure institutional policies and teaching practices do not penalize students for dialect, multilingualism, or non-dominant language norms.

Micro-Leadership

Small, bounded, and often time-limited leadership roles, frequently compensated, that allow adjunct faculty to contribute to instructional improvement, assessment, or governance without requiring full formal authority.

Multilingual Pedagogy

Instructional approaches that affirm students' multiple language resources, design participation and assessment to reduce stigma, and support access to academic discourse.

Participation Pathways

Designed mechanisms that make involvement feasible for adjunct faculty, such as hybrid meeting access, asynchronous input options, role rotation, compensation, and documentation routines that carry ideas into decision-making processes.

Professional Identity (Adjunct)

The evolving sense of professional self is shaped by teaching responsibilities, student relationships, institutional inclusion or exclusion, stability, recognition, and access to collaboration and leadership.

Professional Learning Cycles

Repeatable routines in which faculty implement small changes, examine aggregated evidence (often student work), reflect collectively, revise materials, and document learning so it accumulates across sections and terms.

Psychological Safety (Faculty Learning)

A condition in which instructors can share questions, challenges, and unfinished work without fear of punitive judgment, especially when professional learning is clearly separated from evaluation and employment decisions.

Shared Governance

A formal decision-making system in which responsibility is shared among those affected by institutional decisions; its effectiveness depends on access, compensation, and the practical feasibility of participation.

Teacher Clarity

Observable teaching practices that make learning goals, expectations, task steps, and success criteria explicit, reducing student uncertainty and supporting performance across learner backgrounds and modalities.

Trauma-Informed Teaching

A design stance that prioritizes safety, transparency, predictability, choice, and dignity,

recognizing that trauma and chronic stress affect attention, memory, engagement, and participation.

Translanguaging

The use of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire to make meaning and learn, rather than restricting communication to named language boundaries, supporting access and identity while developing academic discourse.

Two-Tier Faculty System

An organizational structure in which full-time and contingent faculty experience unequal stability, compensation, voice, and access despite shared responsibility for student learning.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

A framework for designing courses that anticipate learner variability through multiple means of engagement, representation, and action or expression, reducing barriers while preserving rigorous learning goals.

Wraparound Supports

Coordinated academic and nonacademic services that address barriers to persistence, including advising, tutoring, financial aid guidance, and basic-needs support.

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INTRODUCTION: THE ADJUNCT FACULTY CHALLENGE

I was proud, excited, and sure I had prepared for my first semester as a community college adjunct. I was also almost immediately shocked and deflated. The desks in my developmental English classroom were filled by a range of students whose lives complicated any simple notion of readiness. English language learners sat beside adults returning to college after a long gap. Recent high school graduates arrived with interrupted educations or with the clear sense that they needed support before attempting College Writing I. A nurse came straight from the night shift. A young mother's baby waited in the hallway with a friend. HiSet and GED recipients settled in beside students with visible and invisible disabilities. A note taker handed me a letter from disability services before I had even finished taking attendance. For many of us, both teacher and students, this was the first day of college.

To prepare for that first class I had spent one hundred dollars at a stationery store and bought binders, pens, legal pads, and every tangible object I believed would make me look and feel like a qualified college professor. I had received multiple emails that this course and others I was scheduled to teach may or may not be cancelled due to under-enrollment. I was nervous and faking it until I made it when I scattered the contents of my new briefcase across a table in the adjunct lounge.

As I printed the syllabi I had prepared after clearing several paper jams, over my shoulder I heard, "you cannot use those." I turned and asked "what?" A seasoned adjunct pointed to the red felt pens peeking from my bag and said, "the pens." When I asked why he explained that marking students' papers with red ink could be harmful and suggested I buy purple. I added it to the list of things I learned that day. What stayed with me was not the pen but the pattern. Much

of what adjuncts learn is learned quickly, informally, and under pressure, often without institutional structures that make the learning visible, consistent, or shared.

In class the lesson continued. Students asked questions I could not answer immediately. Rather than deflecting, we searched together. We navigated the college website as a group and named what we could not yet find or understand. Where do we get student identification cards? How do we use tutoring? How do we make an appointment? What is the library for besides books? Where do we go when technology fails?

The following week I revised the curriculum I had built from the sample syllabus and still met the course outcomes I was supplied. We conducted a scavenger hunt and visited the support services we had explored online. From that point forward, I embedded those resources directly into the course. We toured the library and attended a session on research and citation practices. We learned that the library was where we obtained identification cards and that it also offered free museum passes. We visited the tutoring center and learned how to schedule appointments and eventually gained an embedded tutor who met with us weekly. We visited the technology lab and learned how to create a PowerPoint presentation.

I began attending every professional development opportunity I could access and learned to navigate the college and then I could show students how to do the same. This is where this dissertation came from. This story is not included as a personal preface. It is included because it reveals a structural reality of two-year colleges.

The courses with the highest stakes for student belonging and persistence are often taught by adjunct faculty who are expected to do intensive teaching and intensive navigation work with limited institutional access. The result is a mismatch between what institutions say they value and what their structures make possible. That mismatch explains why this dissertation moves

from analysis to tools. It also explains why the pedagogies in this project are framed as cross disciplinary infrastructure rather than as course specific techniques.

Developmental English is often described as the course before College Writing I designed to prepare students for college level work. In practice it is also a hinge course where institutional values become visible. It is where students decide whether college is a place they belong and where they encounter the hidden rules of academic language, evaluation, and institutional navigation. It is also a course frequently assigned to adjunct faculty, instructors expected to carry significant responsibility while often holding limited access to information, governance, stability, and professional learning. The gap between responsibility and authority is not individual. It is structural and it shapes what students experience as possible.

Adjunct faculty working conditions are student learning conditions, particularly in two-year colleges where adjuncts disproportionately teach foundational courses that function as entry points into college life. When adjuncts are isolated, under compensated, and excluded from decision making, students experience inconsistency, confusion, and barriers that appear personal but are institutional. When adjuncts are supported, included, and compensated, students experience coherence, clearer expectations, and stronger pathways to support.

This calls for a broader restructuring of higher education. Over two thirds of faculty now hold contingent appointments and nearly half are employed part time. This is not a temporary adjustment but a structural reorganization of academic labor. When the majority of instruction is delivered by faculty without stability or governance access, questions of equity and quality are inseparable from questions of employment design.

Two-year colleges feel these consequences most acutely because adjuncts disproportionately teach introductory, remedial, and gateway courses where students either gain

traction or lose it. The skills students must develop in these courses extend beyond content knowledge. They include interpreting expectations, planning work, using feedback, seeking help, and navigating institutional systems that are rarely designed to be self explanatory. When these skills are treated as implicit, students with insider knowledge benefit. When they are taught explicitly, access widens.

For this reason the professional development areas emphasized in this text are intentionally cross disciplinary. Multilingual pedagogy, trauma-informed teaching, scaffolding, Universal Design for Learning, clarity, and metacognition are not limited to English or to gateway courses. They are teaching stances that equip students with transferable strategies they can apply across classrooms and careers. Students who learn how to plan, monitor, revise, communicate, and self advocate carry those skills into biology, statistics, nursing, business, technology, and the workplace.

Every course is built by language. whether explicitly or implicitly, because language underpins all learning and communication. Communicative Language Teaching and Critical Language Awareness clarify that learning involves negotiating meaning and power in disciplinary contexts. When students learn to communicate for real audiences and understand how language norms function, they gain access to academic and professional discourse across fields. These approaches support rigor while expanding access because they teach conventions as purposeful choices rather than as silent gatekeeping.

Trauma-informed teaching, scaffolding, and Universal Design for Learning work together to create predictable, humane, and demanding learning environments. These frameworks anticipate learner variability and reduce unnecessary barriers so students can focus on learning

rather than decoding systems. Scaffolding and metacognitive routines help students recover from disruption and build durable learning habits.

Vocational alignment strengthens this work by connecting learning to real lives and futures without reducing learning to job training. Assignments that emphasize authentic communication, problem solving, collaboration, and technological competence prepare students for transfer and for work. In this work, vocational alignment is framed as an equity practice because it helps students make informed choices about time, effort, and opportunity.

These pedagogical commitments cannot be sustained through individual effort alone. Adjunct faculty are often excluded from governance, professional development, and assessment structures that would allow consistent implementation. This is why the dissertation emphasizes distributed leadership over reliance on shared governance alone. Distributed leadership focuses on routines, practices, and participation pathways that allow those closest to students to shape institutional learning.

Assessment sits alongside leadership because it is one of the primary mechanisms through which colleges claim to know whether students are learning. When assessment functions as collaborative inquiry rather than compliance, and when adjunct faculty participate in framing questions, interpreting evidence, and planning change, improvement becomes more accurate, equitable, and sustainable.

This dissertation therefore pairs scholarly analysis with a practice based Adjunct Governance and Teaching Toolkit. Abstract critique without usable structures reproduces the very exclusion it names. The toolkit offers routines, templates, and pathways that make participation feasible within the realities of adjunct work.

The appendices extend this design. Appendix A, Suggested Professional Development Opportunities for Adjunct Faculty, supports flexible and relevant learning. Appendix B, Collaboration Routines and Shared Teaching Deliverables, provides tools for coherence and shared practice to be stored in a shared repository meeting adjuncts and full time faculty in their own time and space. Appendix C, Evidence and Reflection Tools for Professional Learning Cycles, supports institutional memory and improvement.

The chapters that follow move from historical context and linguistic theory to faculty labor, leadership design, professional learning, and inclusive pedagogy, tracing how institutional structures shape what is possible in classrooms across the two-year college. Adjunct equity as an institutional design problem with educational consequences.

The question is not whether adjuncts matter, but whether two-year colleges will build structures that treat them as full participants in the academic community. When labor practices, governance routines, professional learning, and assessment processes align with institutional mission, colleges move closer to their promise of access, equity, and student success. This dissertation and the toolkit that accompanies it offer one pathway for making that alignment practical, visible, and sustainable.

Dissertation Roadmap

This dissertation is organized into four interconnected movements that guide the reader from structural analysis to applied institutional design. Together, these movements demonstrate how adjunct faculty working conditions shape student learning, institutional coherence, and the ability of two-year colleges to fulfill their open-access mission. The chapters build cumulatively, moving from historical and structural context, to faculty labor conditions, to leadership and

professional learning design, and finally to inclusive pedagogical frameworks and assessment practices. The dissertation concludes with the Adjunct Governance and Teaching Toolkit, which operationalizes the study's findings through practical, repeatable structures that support adjunct inclusion and institutional improvement.

Movement I: Understanding the System and Its Inequities

(Chapters 1–3) establishes the historical, demographic, and structural landscape of the two-year college and demonstrates how adjunct faculty became central to its instructional mission.

Chapter 1 traces the evolution of community colleges and the systemic conditions that expanded contingent labor. Chapter 2 examines linguistic justice and the political nature of language in open-access institutions, showing how linguistic norms, assessment practices, and multilingual realities intersect with equity. Chapter 3 turns to adjunct faculty identity, institutional barriers, and well-being, illustrating how working conditions directly shape student experience and institutional integrity. Together, these chapters show that adjunct equity is not a peripheral labor issue but a core academic concern.

Movement II: Redesigning Faculty Roles and Institutional Structures

(Chapters 4–6) shifts from diagnosis to institutional design. Chapter 4 introduces distributed leadership as a practical alternative to traditional shared governance, focusing on how leadership practice, not position, shapes teaching and student outcomes. Chapter 5 examines collaboration, peer mentoring, and communities of practice as essential infrastructure for reducing isolation and strengthening instructional coherence. Chapter 6 analyzes professional development and evaluation, arguing that sustainable improvement requires compensated, repeatable, and practice-centered learning structures. This movement establishes the institutional conditions

necessary for adjunct faculty to participate fully and for colleges to enact their equity commitments.

Movement III: Designing for Students: Inclusive, Multilingual, Responsive Pedagogy

(Chapters 7–9) turns to classroom practice, demonstrating how inclusive, multilingual, trauma-informed, and universally designed pedagogies form the instructional backbone of equity in two-year colleges. Chapter 7 connects multilingual pedagogy and trauma-informed teaching as overlapping frameworks grounded in safety, transparency, and student agency. Chapter 8 expands this design stance through Universal Design for Learning and differentiated instruction, emphasizing the need to anticipate learner variability rather than retrofit accommodations. Chapter 9 focuses on scaffolding, study skills, and metacognition, showing that students succeed when academic processes are made visible and teachable through intentional routines. Across these chapters, pedagogy is framed as institutional infrastructure rather than individual preference.

Movement IV: Building Institutional Coherence and Sustainable Change

(Chapters 10–12 and the Toolkit) links teaching and learning to broader institutional systems. Chapter 10 situates vocational alignment and workforce expectations within community college curricula. Chapter 11 reframes assessment as collaborative inquiry, connecting data literacy, improvement cycles, and equity-minded decision-making. Chapter 12 synthesizes the dissertation's arguments and calls for structural alignment between mission, labor practices, and governance. The Adjunct Governance and Teaching Toolkit, along with the appendices, provides practice-based tools, routines, and participation pathways that make institutional change feasible and sustainable. These materials translate the dissertation's theoretical and empirical findings

into actionable structures that strengthen adjunct inclusion and improve student learning conditions.

Together, these movements create a coherent arc from structural analysis to applied institutional design. The dissertation argues that equitable student outcomes require equitable faculty structures and that two-year colleges can realize their mission when adjunct faculty are treated not as temporary labor but as central partners in governance, pedagogy, and institutional learning.

CHAPTER ONE:

HISTORY, DEMOGRAPHICS, AND THE ROLE OF THE TWO-YEAR COLLEGE

Community colleges occupy a unique and irreplaceable position within the American higher education landscape. They are far more than local campuses where students can further their education with an easy commute. They have served as engines of opportunity, equity, and innovation for over a century. Their evolution reflects and often anticipates shifts in social priorities, economic demands, and community aspirations. From bustling urban centers to remote rural towns, these institutions have consistently reimagined their role to ensure that higher education is not a privilege for the few but a pathway accessible to all. Understanding this evolution is essential for examining how adjunct faculty sustain much of the teaching that underpins these missions.

I use the terms two-year college and community college with attention to context rather than as simple synonyms. The former highlights institutional structure and credential length, while the latter foregrounds the culture and relationships that make these spaces distinctive. What makes two-year colleges special is not only their open-access mission but the communities they cultivate: networks in which students, faculty, staff, and local partners build belonging, share resources, and navigate complex lives together. In this dissertation, shifting between these terms reflects the dual reality that these institutions are both policy instruments in a stratified higher education system and community-rooted colleges whose everyday practices, including adjunct teaching and student support, are shaped by local histories, values, and relationships. All two-year colleges have the potential to add community.

From the very start, community colleges were shaped by pragmatic ideals and a sense of social purpose. The earliest examples, known as junior colleges, often emerged as extensions of local high schools or were linked with private colleges. These institutions were intended to provide affordable education for students who could not attend traditional universities, reflecting a commitment to accessibility and local service. Their mission was rooted in the belief that higher education should be available to all, not just those with financial means or geographic mobility, a commitment that would later collide with constrained funding and growing reliance on contingent faculty.

Over time, the role of community colleges expanded far beyond their original scope. What began as small, localized programs grew into comprehensive institutions serving diverse populations across the nation. The American Association of Community Colleges (n.d.) describes these colleges as “a vital part of the nation’s higher education system,” offering academic transfer pathways, workforce training, and continuing education. This transformation reflected a growing national focus on workforce development and lifelong learning, positioning community colleges as essential drivers of both individual advancement and economic growth, and as key sites where governance, staffing, and assessment practices shape whether that mission is realized.

One defining characteristic of community colleges has always been their commitment to open access. From their inception, these institutions embraced the belief that higher education should be both affordable and geographically accessible. This “open door” philosophy distinguished them from more selective four-year institutions and reflected a democratic ideal of education for all (Vaughan, 1983, p. 39; Drury, 2003, p. 2). Rather than gatekeeping, community colleges actively sought to create educational ladders for working adults, part-time students, and

individuals whose life circumstances made traditional college attendance nearly impossible (Beach, 2020, p. 73). This ethos remains central to their identity, even as debates about quality and equity continue to shape policy and practice, and subsequent chapters return to the question of whether current funding structures and staffing patterns, including the growth of adjunct employment, fully honor this open-access promise.

From early in their history, community colleges promoted educational and social mobility for groups historically excluded from higher education. Their accessibility opened doors for first-generation students, low-income learners, and racial minorities, providing pathways to both academic transfer and vocational training (Mountjoy, 2022, p. 2582; Haveman & Smeeding, 2006, p. 126). Research confirms that community colleges have served as crucial launch points for upward mobility, particularly for students who might not otherwise attend college (Chetty et al., 2017, p. 4). Although completion rates remain a challenge, the role of these institutions in democratizing education and fostering opportunity is undeniable (Beach, 2020, p. 76). These patterns underscore why the conditions of teaching and learning in community colleges, including adjunct faculty roles, carry such significant implications for equity.

Community colleges also played a pivotal role in expanding access for women. In the early 20th century, junior colleges prepared women for careers as grammar school teachers, offering one of the few professional pathways available at the time (Hornsby, 2008, p. 45). Over the decades, these institutions helped increase female enrollment and faculty representation, while later supporting women's entry into nontraditional fields such as science and technology (St. Rose & Hill, 2013, pp. 7–8). Women constitute a majority of community college students, yet persistent barriers, such as limited childcare and underrepresentation in STEM programs, underscore the ongoing need for equity-focused policies (American Association of University

Women [AAUW], 2013, pp. 12–13). These gendered patterns among students parallel questions about who teaches at community colleges and how employment conditions support or hinder women’s advancement in both full-time and adjunct roles.

The mid-twentieth century marked a decisive turning point for community colleges, as public investment and sweeping policy reforms propelled unprecedented growth. The GI Bill of 1944 opened higher education to millions of returning veterans, dramatically increasing demand for college access and reshaping the educational landscape (Beach, 2020, pp. 72–74; Vaughan, 1983, p. 38). Economic expansion and the rising need for skilled labor further fueled this momentum, prompting states and localities to invest heavily in new campuses. During the decades following World War II, community colleges multiplied at a remarkable pace, creating pathways to higher learning for students who had previously been excluded by cost or geography (Drury, 2003, p. 3). This surge reflected a broader national commitment to democratizing education and meeting workforce needs in an era of rapid industrial and technological change (Jacobs & Worth, 2019, pp. 2–3).

Increases in U.S. diversity prompted community colleges to continually reimagine their mission and structure. Responding to demographic shifts, these institutions embraced principles of inclusivity and developed programs tied directly to the realities of their neighborhoods and regions. From the mid-20th century onward, community colleges positioned themselves as engines of opportunity for racially, ethnically, and economically diverse populations, creating pathways that reflected varied student identities, abilities, and aspirations (Beach, 2020, pp. 112–114; Vaughan, 1983, pp. 38–39). This responsiveness was not incidental. It was rooted in the sector’s founding commitment to local service and its capacity to adapt to changing social

conditions (Drury, 2003, p. 4). These demographic shifts also redefined the context in which adjunct and full-time faculty work, teach, and support students.

Partnerships with community organizations and experimentation with curricular models further illustrate the sector's bottom-up innovation. Community colleges have historically collaborated with civic groups, employers, and nonprofits to design programs that meet local needs, whether through bilingual education, adult literacy initiatives, or culturally relevant workforce training (Jacobs & Worth, 2019, pp. 2–3). These partnerships underscore the colleges' dual role as educational institutions and community anchors, reinforcing their mission to democratize access while promoting regional development (Holzer et al., 2023, p. 6). They also highlight how decisions about program design, staffing, and faculty development, often involving adjunct instructors, are intertwined with broader community and workforce priorities.

While “open access” remains a defining value, persistent obstacles and new forms of inequality have emerged. Genuine access depends not only on admission policies but also on sustained investment in student success and equitable working conditions for faculty and staff (Haveman & Smeeding, 2006, pp. 126–127). Historical challenges around funding and policy coherence continue to test the system's ability to translate ideals into outcomes. Research shows that gaps in completion rates disproportionately affect low-income and minoritized students, raising questions about whether structural inequities undermine the promise of open access (Mountjoy, 2022, pp. 2581–2583; Chetty et al., 2017, pp. 3–4). These tensions frame later questions about how institutions structure faculty roles, including adjunct positions, in ways that either mitigate or exacerbate these inequities.

Despite these challenges, community colleges have repeatedly demonstrated agility in responding to social and economic crises. During recessions, they have expanded adult basic

education and retraining programs. In periods of technological disruption, they have introduced rapid upskilling initiatives and short-term certificates (Jacobs & Worth, 2019, pp. 4–5). The sector’s responsiveness was evident after World War II and remains visible in programs for veterans, displaced workers, and immigrants seeking English language instruction (Beach, 2020, p. 118). This adaptability reflects a broader institutional ethos. Community colleges are designed to pivot quickly in service of public need. Such flexibility, however, depends on the everyday labor of faculty and staff whose working conditions shape what responsiveness looks like on the ground.

Innovation has also characterized the sector’s approach to pedagogy and student support. Colleges have pioneered individualized advising, integrated digital learning environments, and expanded ESL offerings to meet the needs of increasingly heterogeneous student bodies (AAUW, 2013, pp. 12–13; St. Rose & Hill, 2013, pp. 7–8). Many of these initiatives have influenced broader educational reform, positioning community colleges as laboratories for systemic change. For example, competency-based education and guided pathways, models adopted nationally, originated in community college contexts (Beach, 2020, pp. 120–121). These developments heighten the importance of ensuring that all faculty, including adjuncts who often staff entry-level courses, have access to the professional learning and institutional support needed to enact such reforms effectively.

The commitment to diversity and equity remains central to the sector’s evolving mission. Women, racial minorities, and first-generation students continue to rely on community colleges as accessible entry points to higher education (Hornsby, 2008, p. 45; AAUW, 2013, pp. 12–13). Yet persistent barriers, such as childcare shortages and underrepresentation in STEM, signal unfinished work in achieving full inclusion (St. Rose & Hill, 2013, pp. 7–8). As demographic

complexity deepens and economic volatility accelerates, community colleges face the dual challenge of sustaining open access while innovating to ensure that opportunity translates into success for all. Meeting this challenge requires attention not only to student-facing services but also to the structures that shape faculty participation, stability, and voice.

Faculty issues are central to the ongoing evolution of community colleges. Instructors, most of whom hold advanced degrees, operate in a climate marked by both opportunity and precarity. The widespread shift toward adjunct and contingent employment reflects institutional needs for flexibility but also historical patterns of limited investment and evolving priorities (Beach, 2020, pp. 132–134). These changes affect not only working conditions and morale but also the broader climate for innovation, mentorship, and campus culture. As Vaughan (1983, pp. 88–89) observed decades ago, faculty stability and engagement are critical to sustaining the community college mission, a concern that is sharpened by the expansion of contingent roles.

The reliance on part-time faculty has grown dramatically since the late twentieth century. Adjunct instructors teach the majority of courses in many community colleges, a trend driven by budget constraints and enrollment volatility (Drury, 2003, p. 6). While this model offers flexibility, it often limits faculty access to professional development and diminishes their role in governance, creating tensions between institutional adaptability and educational quality (Jacobs & Worth, 2019, pp. 4–5). Research suggests that contingent employment can undermine student success by reducing opportunities for sustained mentorship and advising (Holzer et al., 2023, p. 7). These tensions are central to the chapters that follow and to the Adjunct Governance and Teaching Toolkit’s focus on Governance and Leadership and Culture of Assessment, which examine how employment practices and faculty roles align with community college missions.

For community colleges, the continued growth and diversification of their student body presents both a challenge and a source of strength. Their historic and ongoing commitment to serving underrepresented populations is visible in the expansion of services for first-generation students, newcomers to the United States, and working adults (Beach, 2020, pp. 112–114). Colleges have learned to design and adapt advising, curriculum, faculty development, and support systems to meet the specific needs of a wide variety of learners, reflecting their responsiveness to demographic complexity (Mountjoy, 2022, pp. 2581–2583). This work increasingly depends on coordinated efforts across full-time and adjunct faculty, student services, and community partners. How institutions structure and support those roles shapes whether this responsiveness can be sustained.

The rise of federally designated Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) within the community college sector provides a vivid example of this ongoing adjustment. HSIs, defined by enrolling a significant proportion of Hispanic or Latino students, are tasked with serving populations who often face linguistic and first-generation challenges (St. Rose & Hill, 2013, pp. 7–8). These colleges are not monolithic. Rather, their approaches to student support, program development, and campus culture vary widely, reflecting differences in geography, institutional history, and community context (AAUW, 2013, pp. 12–13). The response to growing diversity is not simply one of enrollment but of active engagement. Programs, resource centers, and bilingual services are designed to address the specific needs and aspirations of their students (Beach, 2020, pp. 112–114). These efforts highlight the importance of aligning hiring, development, and evaluation practices, including those for adjunct faculty, with equity commitments.

Community colleges also serve important roles for other minoritized populations, including Native American, Black, Asian American, Pacific Islander, and LGBTQ+ students.

These groups have historically experienced barriers to both access and completion (Smith Morest, 2013, pp. 319–320). The field has learned that enrolling students from marginalized backgrounds is only the first step. In-depth efforts are necessary to track student progress, create culturally relevant programs, and address differences in retention and graduation (Labaree, 2022). Colleges are experimenting with mentorship models, affinity spaces, and partnerships with local tribes or advocacy groups. These tailored interventions aim to create a sense of belonging, raise persistence, and close achievement gaps (Holzer et al., 2023, pp. 6–7), making the conditions under which faculty teach and advise, whether full-time or adjunct, an equity issue rather than a purely operational concern.

The mid-twentieth-century expansion of community colleges laid the foundation for this diversity-driven mission. Public investment and policy reforms, including the GI Bill, fueled rapid growth in campuses and enrollments (Beach, 2020, pp. 120–121; Vaughan, 1983, pp. 88–89). Reformers argued that the first two years of college should not remain the province of elite universities, and new two-year colleges opened space for Americans blocked by financial, geographic, or social barriers (Drury, 2003, p. 6; Kasper, 2002–2003, pp. 14–15). These developments were as much about social equity as about enrollment figures, positioning community colleges as engines of opportunity and hubs for local advancement (Jacobs & Worth, 2019, pp. 4–6). The contemporary questions of adjunct employment, faculty development, and governance thus unfold within institutions that have long been charged with reconciling ambitious equity goals with constrained and uneven resources.

Community colleges continue to innovate in response to demographic complexity and changing economic demands. Initiatives such as guided pathways, integrated advising, and competency-based education originated in this sector and have influenced national reform efforts

(Beach, 2020, pp. 120–121). These models aim to streamline student progression, reduce attrition, and align curricula with workforce demands, demonstrating the sector’s capacity to lead systemic change (Jacobs & Worth, 2019, pp. 5–6). Workforce programs align closely with regional labor market needs, offering certificates and associate degrees that prepare students for high-demand careers (D’Amico et al., 2019, p. 15). This adaptability underscores the need for faculty structures, including adjunct roles, that can sustain innovation rather than simply absorb fluctuating enrollment.

Persistent challenges remain, however, particularly in closing achievement gaps and ensuring equitable outcomes. Research shows that completion rates for low-income and minoritized students lag behind those of their peers, raising questions about structural barriers and resource allocation (Chetty et al., 2017, pp. 3–4; Haveman & Smeeding, 2006, pp. 126–127). Addressing these disparities requires sustained investment in student support services, faculty development, and financial aid, areas often constrained by fluctuating public budgets (Holzer et al., 2023, p. 6). Faculty development programs that prepare instructors to teach diverse learners and integrate culturally responsive pedagogy are increasingly essential (Hornsby, 2008, p. 45). These needs are particularly acute for adjunct faculty, who frequently have the least access to training despite teaching many gateway and developmental courses.

Faculty development is a critical component of this equity agenda. Programs that prepare instructors to work effectively with multilingual, first-generation, neurodivergent, and adult learners help translate institutional commitments into classroom practice (Hornsby, 2008, p. 45). Yet the contingent nature of much community college employment complicates these efforts, as adjunct faculty often lack access to training, institutional resources, and compensated time for professional learning (Drury, 2003, p. 6). Strengthening professional development for all faculty

is key to ensuring that diversity initiatives translate into meaningful student success. Later chapters return to these questions and connect them to the Adjunct Governance and Teaching Toolkit's Reaching All Learners and MicroLeadership and Communities of Practice domains, which emphasize accessible, context-responsive professional learning.

Presently, the interplay between faculty conditions and student diversity creates a significant barrier for two-year colleges. These institutions remain committed to open access and local service, but their ability to fulfill this promise depends on balancing fiscal realities with investments in human capital (Beach, 2020, pp. 132–134; Vaughan, 1983, pp. 88–89). As demographic shifts accelerate and economic pressures mount, community colleges must continue to innovate not only in curriculum and student services but also in the structures that support faculty engagement and stability. This includes reexamining hiring practices, evaluation systems, and governance arrangements that shape adjuncts' ability to participate fully in campus life. Without such attention, the burden of institutional flexibility will continue to fall on the instructors with the least security.

Neurodiversity represents an emerging area of focus in many community colleges. The open admission policy attracts a significant number of students with learning differences, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, autism spectrum conditions, and other neurodevelopmental profiles. Institutions are increasingly adopting inclusive teaching methods and promoting Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to create equitable learning environments. UDL emphasizes “multiple methods of representation, multiple means of student action and expression, and multiple modes of student engagement” to remove barriers and foster success for all learners (Center for Teaching and Learning [CTL], 2025, para. 6). These principles illustrate

the sector's ongoing efforts to welcome and empower neurodivergent students through accessible physical spaces, flexible course design, and faculty training (Baglieri, 2024, p. 2).

Research underscores the importance of moving beyond compliance toward empowerment in this work. As Accardo et al. (2025) note, "Colleges and universities are broadening their social inclusion reach and increasingly recognizing the importance of valuing neurodivergent students, faculty, and staff" (p. S307). This shift requires embedding neurodiversity into diversity and equity initiatives, expanding mental health supports, and providing faculty development focused on inclusive pedagogy (Accardo et al., 2025, pp. S310–S312). Studies show that neurodivergent students thrive when institutions adopt flexible instructional strategies and technology-driven engagement, reducing stigma and promoting belonging (Durgungoz & Durgungoz, 2025, pp. 6–7). These findings highlight once again that faculty support and development, including for adjunct instructors, are foundational to equity goals.

Despite these advances, long-standing gaps in faculty diversity remain. Community colleges enroll some of the most racially and ethnically diverse student populations in higher education, yet faculty ranks remain disproportionately White (Robinson et al., 2013, p. 2; Munday et al., 2019, p. 4). This demographic mismatch limits opportunities for culturally relevant mentorship and authentic representation in classrooms. As Fairlie, Hoffmann, and Oreopoulos (2014) found, "The performance gap in terms of class dropout rates and grade performance between white and underrepresented minority students falls by 20 to 50 percent when taught by an underrepresented minority instructor" (p. 3). These findings underscore the tangible benefits of faculty diversity for student success and point to the need for hiring and retention practices that attend to race, ethnicity, and other dimensions of identity.

Efforts to address this imbalance include targeted recruitment, equity-focused hiring practices, and professional development programs. Colleges such as Hillsborough Community College have implemented internship pipelines and mentorship programs to prepare minoritized candidates for faculty roles, reporting measurable gains in Hispanic and African American representation (Ashford, 2018, para. 8). National initiatives also emphasize embedding equity into hiring processes and dismantling structural barriers that perpetuate homogeneity in faculty ranks (Griffin, 2023, para. 4). These strategies align with broader calls for systemic change to ensure that faculty demographics reflect the communities they serve. They also intersect with adjunct issues, given that many new faculty of color enter the profession through contingent positions.

Ultimately, the intersection of neurodiversity and faculty diversity underscores the complexity of equity work in community colleges. Both areas demand sustained investment in training, inclusive design, and intentional hiring and promotion practices. As one equity leader observed, “The more diverse our faculty, the more comfortable our students will feel and the more likely they will prosper academically” (Ashford, 2018, para. 6). By embracing neurodiversity as a strength and diversifying faculty ranks, community colleges can advance their mission of access and opportunity while fostering environments where all learners thrive. These commitments require structures that include adjunct faculty as full participants in equity efforts rather than as peripheral labor.

The rapid increase in reliance on adjunct faculty has brought its own set of challenges for community colleges. While adjuncts make possible the wide range of courses and flexible scheduling that define these institutions, they often work under conditions that undermine their professional stability. Many adjuncts lack long-term job security, health insurance, and

compensation commensurate with their contributions. They are frequently excluded from departmental decision-making and shared governance, which limits their ability to influence curriculum or institutional priorities (Ran & Sanders, 2019, pp. 1–2). These structural barriers also restrict access to professional development opportunities, leaving adjuncts without the resources needed to enhance teaching effectiveness.

From the 1970s onward, collective bargaining emerged as a central mechanism through which faculty sought to stabilize working conditions and assert a voice in institutional decision-making. At the very moment when “a large majority of faculty members [came to] hold part-time, nontenurable jobs,” academic unions were increasingly “under attack,” highlighting the tension between institutional reliance on contingent labor and the structures that might protect it (Forum: The future of faculty unions, 2011, para. 1). In many states, community-college unions representing full-time faculty, adjuncts, or both negotiated contracts that established salary scales, workload definitions, and grievance procedures. These agreements did not eliminate precarity, but they introduced clearer expectations around course assignments, reappointment timelines, and access to benefits, giving adjuncts tools to contest arbitrary decisions and to frame issues such as office space, evaluation processes, and participation in governance as contractual rather than discretionary matters (Forum: The future of faculty unions, 2011).

For adjuncts in particular, unions translate broad equity commitments into the concrete resources that make teaching and mentoring sustainable. Contract provisions can secure predictable course loads, paid office hours, and compensation for professional development, turning what might otherwise be uncompensated “extra” labor into recognized work. In systems where collective bargaining has established clear workload norms, these protections make it

more feasible for faculty to sustain the intensive mentoring and advising that community-college missions require (Forum: The future of faculty unions, 2011). As the scenes above suggest, these details matter: a guaranteed office hour or shared workspace can transform a passing hallway conversation into an advising session connected to guided pathways, degree maps, and wraparound supports. When adjuncts know they will return the following term, they can design sequenced assignments across courses, track student progress, and build the kind of long-term relationships that research links to persistence in gateway and developmental classes.

Union practice is also deeply intertwined with questions of inclusion and campus culture. Bargaining agendas increasingly address not only wages and workloads but also paid participation in professional learning, access to instructional technology, and integration into departmental meetings and committees. Contracts that codify compensated training on Universal Design for Learning and inclusive pedagogy, for example, make it more feasible for adjunct faculty to implement reforms intended to support multilingual, first-generation, neurodivergent, and adult learners. In that sense, faculty unions operate alongside broader community-college efforts to expand access and opportunity. Just as community colleges have become “the opportunity for higher education to all Americans,” union contracts help determine which instructors have the time and resources to enact that opportunity in classrooms (Drury, 2003, p. 5).

At the same time, the reach and impact of unionization remain uneven across states and institutions, reflecting variations in labor law, institutional culture, and local organizing histories. In some systems, adjuncts are represented by separate bargaining units. In others, they share contracts with full-time faculty or have no collective bargaining rights at all. These differences shape not only pay and job security but also the extent to which adjuncts can influence

governance structures, implementation of guided pathways, and the design of workforce partnerships. Placing adjunct unions in the context of community college expansion and reform is important. These institutions enroll more than 10 million students and nearly half of all undergraduates, which shows that working conditions are not fixed but shaped by policy choices, negotiations, and collective action that later chapters examine in more detail (Drury, 2003, p. 5).

These conditions have consequences that extend beyond faculty to students, who benefit from sustained relationships with engaged, well-supported instructors. Research suggests that adjuncts often teach multiple courses across different institutions to make ends meet, reducing time for student interaction and advising (Ran & Sanders, 2019, p. 6). Limited access to office space and institutional resources further constrains their ability to meet with students or participate in campus life. These conditions have been linked to lower persistence and progression rates, particularly in developmental and gateway courses where adjuncts are heavily represented (Ran & Sanders, 2019, pp. 18–19). The study concludes that “inferior working conditions for part-time faculty, rather than inferior instructional practices, are driving the negative effects on students’ subsequent course enrollment” (Ran & Sanders, 2019, p. 2), underscoring the urgency of addressing adjunct equity as a student-success issue.

Community colleges have repeatedly found themselves at the center of policy conversations about educational equity, workforce development, and economic mobility. Their mission aligns closely with national priorities for expanding access and addressing skills gaps. As Vaughan (1983) notes, “The community college has become a major instrument of public policy in higher education” (p. 12). This positioning reflects their adaptability and responsiveness to changing societal needs. From the Truman Commission’s mid-century vision

to contemporary workforce initiatives, community colleges have been tasked with democratizing education while serving as engines of opportunity.

Over the decades, these institutions have evolved into key sites for partnerships with employers, government agencies, and community organizations. Such collaborations enable colleges to design programs that meet regional labor market demands and provide pathways to economic mobility for diverse populations (Jacobs & Worth, 2019, pp. 2–3). Workforce development initiatives often include short-term credentials, apprenticeships, and industry-aligned certifications that allow students to enter high-demand fields quickly. Holzer, Lipson, and Wright (2023) emphasize that “community colleges are uniquely positioned to deliver workforce training at scale because of their local ties and flexible programming” (p. 6). These partnerships underscore the sector’s role in bridging education and employment and depend on faculty capacity, including adjuncts, to implement new programs.

State legislatures and federal agencies continually look to community colleges as engines for rapid workforce training, civic engagement, and local economic resilience. During periods of economic uncertainty, such as recessions, enrollment surges as displaced workers seek retraining opportunities. Conversely, in times of growth, colleges expand offerings to support emerging industries. Beach (2020) observes that “community colleges have historically absorbed the shocks of economic cycles, responding with programs that reflect immediate labor market needs” (p. 74). This responsiveness requires not only curricular agility but also strong institutional capacity to implement new initiatives swiftly, raising questions about how contingent faculty are integrated into planning and decision-making.

When economic conditions shift, community colleges are expected to absorb new students and deploy innovative programs on short notice. This expectation places significant

pressure on faculty, facilities, and funding streams. Jacobs and Worth (2019) argue that “the evolving mission of workforce development has stretched community colleges beyond their traditional academic role, demanding new forms of collaboration and resource allocation” (p. 5). Despite these challenges, their ability to pivot quickly remains a defining strength. By leveraging partnerships and embracing innovation, community colleges continue to fulfill their dual mandate of promoting educational equity and supporting economic vitality, even as they grapple with how to support the adjunct faculty who make such flexibility possible.

As student demographics have shifted, so too have campus cultures and programming. Community colleges serve highly diverse populations, including first-generation students, working adults, parents, immigrants, and returning students balancing multiple responsibilities. To meet these needs, campuses have evolved into comprehensive support hubs. Modern community college campuses resemble small villages, offering libraries, tutoring centers, childcare, mental health counseling, and food pantries to address both academic and nonacademic barriers (McCann & Pechota, 2022, p. 2). These services reflect an understanding that “students are people with complex needs and responsibilities in and out of the classroom environment” (McCann & Pechota, 2022, p. 3), and they depend on faculty who can recognize and respond to those realities in their courses.

Comprehensive approaches to student support have become central to institutional strategy. Guided pathways, holistic advising, and wraparound services are increasingly viewed as essential for improving student outcomes. According to the U.S. Department of Education, “Effective advising, particularly holistic advising that is well-integrated with wraparound support services, can play a central role in helping students navigate the complicated systems and processes that are critical to success on campus” (U.S. Department of Education, 2024, p. 4).

These models integrate academic planning with access to financial aid, career counseling, and basic-needs assistance, ensuring that students receive coordinated support rather than fragmented interventions. For community colleges that rely heavily on adjunct faculty, aligning advising, curriculum, and classroom practice becomes a shared responsibility across employment categories.

Evidence suggests that these strategies are not merely beneficial but necessary to maintain graduation rates and promote equity. Jacobs and Worth (2019) argue that “the evolving mission of workforce development has expanded to include wraparound supports that address barriers beyond the classroom” (p. 3). Programs such as Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) and Single Stop have demonstrated significant gains in retention and completion by combining structured academic pathways with comprehensive advising and resource navigation (U.S. Department of Education, 2024, p. 5). These initiatives underscore the importance of addressing students’ holistic needs as a prerequisite for academic success. They also highlight why faculty, often adjuncts in gateway courses, need clear information channels, support structures, and professional learning that connect them to these resources.

The integration of guided pathways and wraparound services reflects a broader shift toward student-centered design in higher education. Two-year colleges are equipped to offer career-based certificates and training aside academic degrees. This dual focus, both academic and nonacademic, acknowledges that access alone is insufficient without the infrastructure to sustain engagement. By embedding advising, mental health resources, and basic-needs support into the fabric of campus life, community colleges advance their mission of equity and opportunity while responding to the realities of today’s student population. Ensuring that adjunct

faculty are integrated into these systems (in communication, training, and governance) is therefore part of the student-centered project.

Building on these comprehensive support strategies, continuous adaptation is critical for community colleges to sustain their mission in an era of rapid change. Institutional leaders operate in a highly dynamic environment shaped by fluctuating funding priorities, new state mandates, labor market disruptions, and evolving societal expectations about the value and affordability of education. Vaughan (1983) observed decades ago that “the community college has always been an institution in motion, responding to the pressures and demands of its environment” (p. 15). This observation remains true as colleges navigate complex challenges while striving to maintain access and equity. How they structure faculty roles, including adjunct positions, and how they assess and adjust those structures over time is a central part of that ongoing adaptation.

The most successful community colleges are distinguished by their ability to innovate rapidly in response to both opportunity and crisis. They experiment with curriculum, governance structures, and delivery models to meet emerging needs. Beach (2020) notes that “community colleges have historically absorbed the shocks of economic cycles, responding with programs that reflect immediate labor market needs” (p. 74). This agility is evident in the expansion of online learning, accelerated credentials, and competency-based education, all designed to provide flexible pathways for students balancing work, family, and school (Beach, 2020, pp. 74, 120–121). Such innovation depends on faculty who can adapt pedagogy and course design. This is an expectation that increasingly includes adjunct instructors who often have the least institutional support.

Partnerships play a pivotal role in this adaptive capacity. Colleges increasingly collaborate with local businesses, workforce boards, and community organizations to align programs with regional economic priorities. These partnerships not only strengthen job-placement outcomes but also reinforce the colleges' role as catalysts for community development and economic resilience (Jacobs & Worth, 2019, pp. 2–3, 5–6). Their effectiveness, however, rests on the day-to-day work of faculty who design and teach courses that meet both academic standards and employer expectations.

Despite persistent underfunding, high expectations, and the complexity of contemporary social and economic challenges, community colleges have remained steadfast in their mission to educate, uplift, and adapt. Jacobs and Worth (2019) argue that “the evolving mission of workforce development has stretched community colleges beyond their traditional academic role, demanding new forms of collaboration and resource allocation” (p. 5). This expansion underscores the sector's resilience and its capacity to reinvent itself in response to shifting demands. At the same time, it highlights the risk of relying on contingent labor to sustain ambitious agendas without commensurate investment in faculty stability, development, and governance participation.

National enrollment numbers bear out the impressive scale of community colleges. Millions of Americans, across backgrounds and generations, start or return to higher education through these local gateways. As Beach (2020) asserts, “community colleges have become the primary entry point to higher education for vast numbers of Americans” (p. 3). This enduring role reflects not only their accessibility but also their adaptability, a defining characteristic that ensures their continued relevance in a rapidly changing educational landscape. It also means that

decisions about adjunct employment, faculty development, and governance reverberate widely, affecting large proportions of the nation’s college students.

Focusing on adaptability and innovation, the story of community colleges is one of continuous negotiation between ambition and limitation. These institutions balance the promise of open access with the realities of constrained resources. Vaughan (1983) captured this tension succinctly: “The community college has always been an institution of compromise, striving to reconcile ideals with practical constraints” (p. 22). This balancing act requires persistent advocacy for adequate public investment, faculty support, and equitable student outcomes, even as colleges face recurring debates over completion rates and stratification (Beach, 2020, p. 81). Within this context, the working conditions and governance roles of adjunct faculty emerge as central levers for whether community colleges can fulfill, rather than merely proclaim, their historic mission of opportunity.

Key Takeaways

Chapter 1, Movement I: Understanding the System and Its Inequities

The evolution of community colleges shows how open-access ideals, shifting demographics, and chronic underfunding created a system where adjunct faculty carry the most consequential teaching work for students whose futures depend on early academic success. When more than three-quarters of courses are taught by adjuncts, acknowledging their centrality is no longer optional, recognizing adjuncts as institutional change agents is essential to the future of equitable, high-quality community college education.

CHAPTER TWO:
LINGUISTIC JUSTICE AND EQUITY IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Linguistic justice in two-year colleges is not an abstract ideal but a concrete condition of possibility for student success. When English is treated as a neutral, technical skill, institutions obscure the ways that language functions as capital and power in stratified educational systems. In open-access colleges that serve many first-generation, multilingual, low-income, racially marginalized, and neurodivergent students, English and writing classrooms are often their first extended experience with the norms of higher education. In these spaces, policies around “standard” English, placement, and assessment can either widen or narrow opportunity. A critical view of language foregrounds how these practices distribute legitimacy, belonging, and access to advanced coursework, and it challenges colleges to ensure that their linguistic expectations do not contradict their stated missions of access and equity.

Understanding the complex landscape of community colleges and the role of adjunct faculty demands a multi-layered theoretical foundation. This inquiry begins with pedagogical and social justice frameworks that illuminate how demographic shifts, policy changes, and institutional cultures have influenced educational access, teaching strategies, and the lived experiences of students and faculty. These frameworks are not abstract ideals but practical lenses that shape classroom practice, professional development, and institutional decision-making. They provide the conceptual scaffolding for analyzing how adjunct faculty navigate systems that often marginalize their contributions while expecting them to serve increasingly diverse student populations.

Communicative Language Teaching offers one foundational approach for understanding language pedagogy in community colleges. CLT emerged from research on linguistic competency and the nature of real-world communication, positioning authentic interaction at the center of language learning. Rather than focusing on grammar drills or rote memorization, CLT prioritizes meaningful communication among students, often through collaborative tasks such as planning a community event or conducting mock interviews. Instructors might use authentic materials like local news articles or podcasts to spark discussion, encouraging learners to negotiate meaning and express opinions in real time. These practices help students see language as a living tool rather than a static set of rules. Canagarajah (2011) emphasizes that “language learning is not a linear accumulation of discrete skills but a dynamic negotiation of meaning in diverse contexts” (p. 4).

In active CLT classrooms, learners engage with authentic materials such as news articles or podcasts and communicate ideas relevant to their lives and futures. The role of the instructor shifts from direct authority to facilitator, guiding students toward using language as a tool for both academic advancement and personal empowerment. This method recognizes that communication is a process marked by trial and error and encourages students to take creative risks, make mistakes, and practice language in varied contexts. In the context of community colleges, with their richly diverse student populations, CLT helps promote inclusion and gives each learner a genuine voice in the classroom.

This chapter therefore treats English not simply as a vehicle for content but as a technology of power that can discipline or liberate. Building on Bourdieu’s account of cultural and institutional capital, I argue that access to “legitimate” forms of English is one of the primary resources through which community colleges sort and signal value within their fields. At the

same time, Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth framework insists that students and many adjunct instructors already possess robust aspirational, familial, linguistic, social, navigational, and resistant capital that traditional English norms often overlook or devalue. Critical Language Awareness and related work by Janks, Shapiro, and others push educators to see language education as inherently political, requiring explicit attention to whose discourses are centered, whose are marginal, and how classroom practices can redistribute linguistic access, asset, and agency rather than simply enforcing inherited hierarchies. Seen through this lens, English instruction becomes a central site where community colleges either reproduce or interrupt broader patterns of racialized and classed inequality.

Shapiro (2025) reinforces this point by stating that "our commitment to linguistic access, asset, and agency must be enacted through deliberate pedagogical choices" (p. 12). These insights underscore that language education is inseparable from questions of justice and institutional responsibility. Critical Language Awareness calls attention to the ideological nature of language practices. Janks emphasizes that literacy education is inherently political because language use is tied to power relations and social identities (Janks, 2010, p. 15). This insight reinforces the need for educators to interrogate language policies that marginalize non-standard dialects and multilingual practices.

The stakes of this linguistic framing are heightened by the institutional reality that adjunct faculty teach a disproportionate share of gateway and developmental English and writing courses in community colleges. These courses are the sites where fundamental critical thinking and study skills are attained or not, and where disadvantaged populations are most likely either to receive sustained support or to fall through the cracks. When adjunct instructors working under conditions of precarity are tasked with teaching students whose home languages, dialects, and

literacies have often been stigmatized, the risk of reproducing linguistic and racial hierarchies increases. Conversely, when these same instructors are supported to enact critical language awareness, asset-based, and culturally sustaining approaches to English, they become central agents in disrupting deficit narratives and expanding students' access to powerful literacies. This connection underscores that adjunct working conditions and language policy are mutually reinforcing levers in any serious effort to advance equity.

Equity and culturally responsive teaching frameworks deepen the commitment to social justice within educational spaces. Unlike approaches that view diversity as a challenge to be managed, equity-centered pedagogy sees the variety of student backgrounds, languages, and experiences as essential assets. Delgado Bernal (2002) asserts that “students of color are not passive recipients of knowledge but active creators of epistemologies grounded in their lived realities” (p. 106). Culturally responsive teaching intentionally honors and integrates students' cultural knowledge, traditions, and life experiences into lesson planning, content selection, and classroom dialogue. Instructors learn to adapt teaching methods, assessment tools, and even classroom interactions to meet the unique needs of all learners.

Culturally responsive teaching affirms the knowledge systems students bring to the classroom. Delgado Bernal highlights that students of color create epistemologies grounded in their lived experiences, challenging dominant narratives in education (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 106). Integrating these perspectives into curriculum design validates student identities and promotes equity. Community colleges, which are often the first point of contact with higher education for marginalized populations, rely on these frameworks to improve retention, engagement, and student success. The commitment to equity means that educators act not only as

instructors but as advocates, eliminating barriers and designing interventions that respond to individual and group realities.

Asset-based teaching approaches, including the widely cited Community Cultural Wealth framework, build on these ideas by shifting the narrative about what students and faculty bring to the college environment. Yosso (2005) explains that “community cultural wealth consists of an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by communities of color to survive and resist macro and micro forms of oppression” (p. 77). Rather than focusing on perceived deficits or gaps, asset-based models recognize the social, familial, linguistic, and navigational strengths that individuals carry with them. Yosso argues that communities of color possess multiple forms of cultural wealth, including linguistic and social capital, which enable resilience and success despite systemic challenges (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). Recognizing these resources shifts institutional discourse from remediation to empowerment.

These frameworks invite faculty and administrators to recognize, celebrate, and expand upon the assets already present within the student body and teaching staff. Community colleges that adopt asset-based approaches design advising, mentoring, and curricular supports that draw on students’ cultural strengths and collective knowledge. By validating the experiences of everyone involved in the learning process, these practices strengthen belonging, enhance motivation, and promote academic success.

As the sector has diversified, these theoretical frameworks have become increasingly influential in shaping policy and practice. Various trends, from demographic shifts to changes in funding and governance, have required institutions to re-examine outdated paradigms and develop responsive models geared toward both access and excellence. In community colleges in particular, they provide a vocabulary and set of design principles for aligning curriculum,

assessment, and faculty roles with the lived realities, strengths, and aspirations of students and instructors.

Critical race theory and Latino critical theory further underscore why English classrooms in two-year colleges are key sites of epistemic struggle. Delgado Bernal's articulation of critical raced-gendered epistemologies and Solórzano and Yosso's emphasis on counter-storytelling highlight how narrative, reflection, and academic writing can either suppress or surface the knowledges that students of color and multilingual students bring to campus. In first-year composition, developmental English, and English for multilingual learners, decisions about whose stories are assigned, which Englishes are modeled as authoritative, and how "voice" is evaluated all signal whose experiences are treated as legitimate knowledge. For many students, these courses shape whether they come to see themselves as college writers and thinkers or internalize the belief that their language and histories are not welcome in higher education. Situating English instruction within CRT and LatCrit therefore clarifies that language pedagogy is inseparable from struggles over whose lives and perspectives are recognized as fully human and fully scholarly.

Bourdieu (1986) provides a useful lens for understanding these dynamics, noting that "capital is accumulated labor which, when appropriated on a private basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor" (p. 241). Bourdieu explains that different forms of capital, economic, cultural, and social, shape individuals' opportunities within institutional structures, influencing who has access to resources and power (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243). This insight helps explain how institutional resources and cultural norms reproduce inequalities even as colleges claim to promote inclusion.

Contemporary professional development for adjunct faculty draws explicitly on CLT to foster meaningful engagement, CLA to address issues of representation and campus climate, and asset-based pedagogy to support new ways of mentoring and teaching diverse learners. The essential question driving this inquiry focuses on the intersection of demographic, policy, and institutional trends in defining the growth and current realities of community colleges and their adjunct workforce. Researchers and practitioners alike grapple with understanding how changing patterns of student and faculty diversity reshape campus identity, impact policy making, and inform daily teaching practices.

Shifts in enrollment, department staffing, and governance structures have not occurred randomly. They are the result of intentional design but also unplanned adaptation, often in response to pressure from students, advocacy groups, and community stakeholders. Callahan and Gándara (2014) highlight that “language and literacy skills are increasingly linked to labor market outcomes, making bilingualism a critical economic resource” (p. 3). This observation underscores the urgency of aligning educational practices with broader social and economic realities.

An important research question arises from these realities: How have the diversity of students and faculty influenced the development and execution of policies in community colleges? This question opens up avenues for exploring not only the direct experiences of those in the classroom but also the systemic forces shaping inclusion, resource allocation, and academic opportunity. Changes in faculty demographics, combined with increased advocacy for meaningful professional development, have led to new models for curricular reform, student support, and campus leadership.

Villanueva (1993) captures the personal dimension of these shifts, writing that “to be an academic of color is to live in tension between worlds, negotiating identity and legitimacy in spaces that often deny both” (p. 70). Rodríguez (1981) offers a similar reflection, describing education as “the achievement of desire, a process that distances the learner from the family and community that first nurtured that desire” (p. 50). These narratives remind us that policy debates are inseparable from human stories of aspiration, struggle, and resilience.

A vital area where these frameworks apply is in the critical analysis of professional development for adjunct faculty. Too often, well-intentioned initiatives promise empowerment but remain tokenistic in practice, failing to overturn entrenched hierarchies or address real inequities. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) argue that “counter-storytelling is a method of exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (p. 26). Applying CLA and equity frameworks moves the discussion past superficial engagement, interrogating whether institutional culture is truly transformed or just superficially adjusted.

Genuine change requires moving beyond performative empathy and toward practices that redraw power relations, validate diverse expertise, and make room for distributed leadership. Lederach (1995) reminds us that “conflict transformation is not about ending conflict but about building constructive change processes that reduce violence and increase justice” (p. 17). This principle applies to educational institutions as they confront structural inequities and strive for authentic inclusion.

Ury (1991) similarly emphasizes that “the essence of negotiation is not defeating the other side but finding ways to meet underlying interests” (p. 19). For adjunct faculty, this means creating spaces where their voices shape policy rather than merely responding to mandates from above. It also means surfacing the shared interests that adjuncts, full-time faculty, and

administrators hold, such as student success, instructional quality, and institutional stability. Then, decisions about workload, evaluation, and professional development become collaborative rather than adversarial. Framing governance conversations in this way positions adjunct faculty not as petitioners at the margins, but as partners whose classroom expertise is indispensable to crafting durable, equity-minded agreements.

Debates about English standards, multilingualism, and rigor are deeply intertwined with identity, status, and institutional culture. Conversations and changes around these topics frequently manifest as conflicts among faculty, administrators, and staff. Integrating Lederach's framework of conflict transformation into this chapter positions these tensions not as distractions from the linguistic justice project but as predictable features of change in stratified institutions. Lederach's insistence on building "constructive change processes that reduce violence and increase justice" invites community colleges to treat disagreements over language policy, placement, and curriculum as opportunities to reimagine relationships, not simply as problems to manage.

In the context of linguistic justice, the "violence" at issue is often symbolic and structural, embodied in gatekeeping assessments, punitive attitudes toward multilingual writers, and the exclusion of adjuncts from decisions about English curricula and standards. Addressing such conflicts requires sustained relational work that centers those most affected, rather than short-term, top-down fixes.

Ury's model of interest-based negotiation complements this perspective by shifting institutional conversations from entrenched positions to underlying interests. Faculty who insist on maintaining "standard English" requirements, multilingual specialists advocating for translanguaging, and administrators focused on transferability and labor market expectations

often appear to hold irreconcilable positions. Yet when these groups articulate their interests, students' access to powerful literacies, clarity of expectations, institutional integrity, and alignment with external stakeholders, significant common ground emerges. Designing English outcomes, rubrics, and placement practices through interest-based negotiation creates space for agreements that preserve rigor while explicitly valuing rhetorical flexibility, linguistic diversity, and student agency. By bringing adjuncts, especially those teaching gateway English and writing, into these negotiations from the outset, colleges can move from imposing policies on contingent instructors to co-constructing criteria and supports that reflect the realities of their classrooms.

Together, Lederach and Ury point toward concrete structures that can move diverse opinions about language into collaborative action. Adjunct-inclusive communities of practice, cross-role curriculum committees, and compensated departmental dialogues become venues for the kind of sustained, relational work Lederach describes, in which participants build shared narratives about the purpose of English in their local context. When these spaces are explicitly framed around Ury's principles, separating people from problems, focusing on interests rather than positions, and developing options for mutual gain, they are more likely to generate durable agreements about English standards, assessment, and support for multilingual writers. In this way, conflict-transformation and negotiation frameworks are not ancillary to linguistic justice but integral to the practical work of reshaping policies, practices, and professional development so that students receive the education they need and deserve.

The challenge of transforming institutional culture in community colleges cannot be overstated. While diversity initiatives often appear in mission statements and strategic plans, their implementation frequently falls short of meaningful change. Yosso and Solórzano (2006) describe this phenomenon in the context of Chicana and Chicano educational pipelines, noting

that “leaks occur at every level, from elementary school through graduate education, as systemic barriers persist despite reform rhetoric” (p. 2). This observation resonates with the adjunct faculty experience, where professional development programs may promise empowerment yet fail to dismantle structural inequities. The persistence of hierarchical norms and resource disparities underscores the need for frameworks that interrogate power relations rather than merely celebrate diversity.

Professional development for adjunct faculty occupies a critical space in this discussion. Adjunct instructors often teach the majority of courses in community colleges, yet they remain excluded from decision-making processes and lack access to institutional resources. Lederach (1995) offers a useful perspective on this dynamic, arguing that “sustainable change requires building relationships that transcend immediate conflicts and create platforms for ongoing dialogue” (p. 23). Applying this principle to faculty development suggests that workshops and training sessions must move beyond technical skill-building to foster collaborative networks and shared governance. Ury (1991) reinforces this idea, stating that “negotiation is about creating options for mutual gain, not imposing unilateral solutions” (p. 34). For adjunct faculty, this means that professional development should not be a top-down mandate but a participatory process that values their expertise and addresses their material conditions.

The narratives of faculty of color provide further insight into the limitations of current approaches. Villanueva (1993) reflects on his own academic journey, writing that “the bootstrap myth obscures the structural realities that shape educational attainment, placing undue responsibility on individuals while absolving institutions of accountability” (p. 72). Rodríguez (1981) similarly critiques the assimilationist logic of traditional education, observing that “success in school often entails a painful estrangement from the cultural and linguistic practices

that constitute one's identity" (p. 53). These testimonies challenge institutions to reconsider what counts as success and whose knowledge is legitimized within academic spaces. They also highlight the emotional labor required to navigate environments that demand conformity while professing inclusion.

Critical race theory and Latino critical theory offer powerful tools for analyzing these contradictions. Delgado Bernal (2002) emphasizes that "critical raced-gendered epistemologies recognize the intersectional nature of oppression and the ways in which students of color produce knowledge that disrupts dominant paradigms" (p. 108). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) operationalize this insight through counter-storytelling, which they define as "a method for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege" (p. 26).

In the context of adjunct faculty development, counter-stories can illuminate the lived realities behind institutional metrics and reveal how policies intended to promote equity may reproduce exclusionary practices. These frameworks demand that research and practice center the voices of those most affected by systemic inequities rather than treating them as peripheral concerns. In doing so, they position adjunct narratives as essential data for reimagining evaluation, professional learning, and governance structures in ways that genuinely disrupt rather than repackage inequality.

Language policy represents another arena where equity and power intersect. Callahan and Gándara (2014) argue that bilingualism is not merely a cognitive asset but an economic resource that shapes labor market trajectories (p. 5). Yet educational institutions often treat multilingualism as a deficit, imposing remediation rather than leveraging linguistic diversity as a strength. Canagarajah (2011) critiques this deficit orientation, noting that "translanguaging

practices challenge the monolingual bias of traditional pedagogy and open possibilities for more inclusive approaches to language education” (p. 7).

CLA operationalizes this critique by equipping educators to interrogate the ideological assumptions embedded in language standards and assessment practices. Janks (2010) underscores the stakes of this work, asserting that “literacy education cannot be divorced from questions of power, identity, and access” (p. 22). For community colleges serving multilingual populations, these insights call for a reimagining of curriculum and assessment that affirms linguistic diversity rather than penalizing it.

The concept of capital provides a useful lens for understanding how these dynamics play out in institutional settings. Bourdieu (1986) distinguishes among economic, cultural, and social capital, arguing that “the structure of the distribution of capital determines the chances of success for individuals and groups within a given field” (p. 243). In community colleges, adjunct faculty often lack the institutional capital that full-time faculty enjoy, such as access to networks, resources, and decision-making authority. This disparity affects not only their professional trajectories but also the quality of education they can provide to students. Asset-based frameworks such as Yosso’s (2005) Community Cultural Wealth challenge this deficit logic by identifying the forms of capital that marginalized communities possess and mobilize. Yosso writes that “aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital constitute a repertoire of resources that enable communities of color to persist and thrive despite systemic barriers” (p. 79). Integrating this perspective into faculty development means recognizing and valuing the cultural wealth that adjunct instructors bring to their roles, whether through multilingual competence, community engagement, or lived experience.

Despite the promise of these frameworks, their implementation often falters in the face of institutional and individual resistance to change. Shapiro (2025) warns that “commitment to linguistic access and agency must be more than rhetorical; it requires structural changes that redistribute power and resources” (p. 14). This observation applies equally to equity initiatives that remain symbolic rather than substantive. Spicksley and Kington (2024) caution that “without systemic support, CLA risks becoming an individual teacher’s burden rather than an institutional priority” (p. 30). These critiques underscore the importance of aligning professional development with broader organizational change efforts. Piecemeal interventions may yield temporary gains, but they cannot dismantle the structural conditions that marginalize adjunct faculty and multilingual students.

The tension between performative and transformative change is evident in the proliferation of diversity statements and workshops that fail to alter hiring practices, workload distributions, or compensation structures. Lederach’s (1995) framework for conflict transformation offers a way forward by emphasizing relational approaches to change. He writes that “building peace involves creating spaces where diverse voices can engage in constructive dialogue about shared futures” (p. 29). Applied to community colleges, this means designing professional development as a collaborative process that includes adjunct faculty in decision-making and resource allocation. Ury (1991) complements this perspective by highlighting the role of interest-based negotiation in resolving conflicts. He observes that “lasting agreements emerge when parties move beyond positions to explore underlying interests” (p. 41). For adjunct faculty, these interests include job security, fair compensation, and opportunities for professional growth. These are conditions that enable them to serve students effectively.

The stakes of these discussions extend beyond faculty development to the broader mission of community colleges. As institutions committed to access and equity, community colleges occupy a paradoxical position: they serve populations historically excluded from higher education while operating within systems that reproduce inequality. Villanueva (1993) captures this paradox poignantly, noting that “the rhetoric of opportunity often masks the reality of constraint” (p. 74). Rodríguez (1981) echoes this sentiment, reflecting on the ambivalence of educational success: “to achieve academically is to risk losing the intimacy of cultural belonging” (p. 55). These narratives remind us that equity is not a static goal but an ongoing negotiation of values, identities, and power relations.

In light of these complexities, the theoretical frameworks outlined in this paper offer both critique and possibility. CLT and CLA challenge monolithic conceptions of language and literacy, advocating for pedagogies that honor linguistic diversity and promote critical consciousness. Equity and culturally responsive teaching frameworks call for curricular and institutional practices that affirm the cultural identities of students and faculty. Asset-based approaches such as Community Cultural Wealth reframe deficit narratives, highlighting the resources that marginalized communities bring to educational spaces. Critical race theory and Latino critical theory expose the structural dimensions of inequality and provide tools for resistance and transformation. Together, these frameworks constitute a robust foundation for reimagining professional development and institutional culture in community colleges.

The path forward requires moving beyond tokenistic gestures toward systemic change. This entails revising policies to ensure equitable compensation and job security for adjunct faculty, redesigning curricula to reflect linguistic and cultural diversity, and creating governance structures that include contingent faculty in decision-making. It also demands a shift in

institutional discourse from deficit to asset, from assimilation to affirmation, and from performative empathy to authentic solidarity. As Lederach (1995) reminds us, “transformation is not an event but a process that unfolds through sustained engagement and mutual learning” (p. 33). For community colleges, this process begins with acknowledging the limitations of current practices and committing to the hard work of structural reform.

The challenges facing community colleges and adjunct faculty demand solutions that go beyond surface-level reforms. Janks’ work on language and power reminds us that literacy and communication are never neutral. They are deeply embedded in social hierarchies that shape access and opportunity. Applying this insight means that professional development must include critical language awareness as a core component, enabling faculty to recognize and challenge linguistic norms that marginalize students and instructors alike (Janks, 2010, p. 15).

When faculty understand the ideological nature of language, they can design classroom practices that empower students rather than reinforce inequities. For example, instructors might incorporate assignments that analyze media representations of language diversity, helping students see how language policies reflect broader power structures. This approach aligns with Janks’ argument that literacy education cannot be divorced from questions of identity and access (Janks, 2010, p. 22).

Beyond the classroom, Janks’ framework calls for institutional policies that value multilingualism as an asset rather than a deficit. Community colleges serve linguistically diverse populations, yet remediation often dominates language policy. By adopting Janks’ perspective, colleges can create programs that celebrate linguistic diversity and integrate it into curriculum design, fostering inclusion and equity at every level (Janks, 2010, p. 18).

While Janks provides a lens for understanding language and power, Lederach offers guidance on transforming institutional relationships. His concept of conflict transformation emphasizes building constructive processes that reduce injustice and promote dialogue. For adjunct faculty, this means creating spaces where their voices are heard and respected in governance structures. Lederach argues that sustainable change requires relationships that transcend immediate disputes and foster long-term collaboration (Lederach, 1995, p. 23).

Applying Lederach's principles to professional development involves moving beyond technical workshops toward relational engagement. Institutions should design programs that bring adjunct and full-time faculty together to share experiences, identify common goals, and co-create solutions. These practices build trust and solidarity, reducing the isolation that often characterizes adjunct work (Lederach, 1995, p. 29).

Lederach also reminds us that transformation is not an event but a process. Colleges must commit to ongoing dialogue and reflection, recognizing that equity cannot be achieved through one-time initiatives. This perspective challenges performative diversity efforts and calls for structural reforms that redistribute power and resources over time (Lederach, 1995, p. 33).

Complementing Lederach's relational approach, Ury's work on negotiation provides practical strategies for resolving conflicts and advancing equity. Ury emphasizes interest-based negotiation, which focuses on underlying needs rather than rigid positions. For adjunct faculty, these interests include fair compensation, job security, and professional respect. By identifying shared interests, institutions can craft agreements that benefit both faculty and students (Ury, 1991, p. 19).

In practice, Ury's framework suggests that colleges should involve adjunct faculty in decision-making processes from the outset. Rather than imposing mandates from above,

administrators can engage faculty in collaborative problem-solving sessions. These dialogues allow all parties to articulate their concerns and explore creative options for mutual gain (Ury, 1991, p. 34).

Ury also highlights the importance of separating people from problems. In the context of adjunct advocacy, this means addressing systemic issues without framing them as personal failings. Institutions should focus on structural barriers, such as lack of benefits or exclusion from governance, rather than attributing challenges to individual shortcomings (Ury, 1991, p. 41). Applied to this chapter's focus on language and equity, this orientation invites colleges to interrogate how policies around English, evaluation, and professional development are organized, rather than pathologizing the adjuncts who must navigate them.

Together, the insights of Janks, Lederach, and Ury offer a comprehensive framework for addressing the complex issues facing community colleges. Janks calls for critical awareness of language and power, Lederach emphasizes relational transformation, and Ury provides tools for constructive negotiation. Integrating these perspectives can move institutions beyond tokenistic reforms toward genuine equity and inclusion.

This integrated approach requires commitment at every level of the college. Faculty development programs must incorporate critical pedagogy, relational engagement, and collaborative negotiation strategies. Administrators must allocate resources to support these initiatives and ensure that adjunct faculty have a meaningful voice in shaping institutional policies. Only through sustained effort can colleges fulfill their mission of access and opportunity for all.

Applying the work of Janks, Lederach, and Ury to community college challenges underscores a fundamental truth: equity is not a static goal but a dynamic process. It demands

critical reflection, authentic dialogue, and shared responsibility. By embracing these principles, community colleges can transform not only their policies but their culture, creating educational spaces where diversity is celebrated, justice is prioritized, and every participant is empowered to thrive.

Key Takeaways

Chapter 2, Movement I: Understanding the System and Its Inequities

The language practices that shape who feels seen, heard, or academically legitimate in open-access classrooms reveal how deeply power and opportunity are embedded in everyday instruction. When adjuncts are the ones navigating these linguistic and racialized dynamics in the courses where stakes are highest, their role as key architects of equity becomes undeniable, and their recognition as institutional change agents becomes essential.

CHAPTER THREE:

ADJUNCT FACULTY: PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY, INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS, AND WELL-BEING

Although adjunct faculty now teach most community college courses, their everyday work unfolds within structures that offer little voice, uncertain stability, and insufficient acknowledgment of their contributions. This reality reaches beyond statistics and shapes the everyday rhythm of academic life, appearing when instructors who carry the center of teaching find themselves outside the conversations that set calendars and resources, when budgets are decided without the people who teach most of the courses, and in the quiet of classrooms after students leave and an instructor is left to wonder whether next term will include work. Federal figures summarized by the AAUP (Colby, 2023, p. 2) report that “over two-thirds (68 percent) of faculty members in US colleges and universities held contingent appointments in fall 2021, compared with about 47 percent in fall 1987.” The same report adds, “Nearly half (48 percent) of faculty members in US colleges and universities were employed part time in fall 2021, compared with about 33 percent in 1987” (Colby, 2023, p. 2). Together, these numbers frame the central concern of this chapter: how structural shifts in academic employment shape adjunct professional identity, institutional participation, and well-being in community colleges.

Data does more than describe a workforce. It marks a reorganization of who is protected, who is replaceable, and who is asked to hold the institution together without structural security. The AAUP (Colby, 2023, p. 3) makes the stakes explicit, stating that “tenure is the primary means of protecting academic freedom and exists not only to protect individual faculty members but also to benefit students and serve the common good by ensuring the quality of teaching and research in higher education.” When an institution relies heavily on contingent labor, the

question is not only pay. It is whether academic freedom and instructional quality can be sustained with integrity when protections are uneven and when voice is conditional.

In community colleges, these shifts carry immediate consequences because the college is often a first and only entry point for students navigating poverty, work, family responsibilities, and unfamiliar systems. Community colleges are built on access, urgency, and the promise that learning can change the direction of a life, yet access is often maintained by a labor structure that holds instructors close to students but far from decision making. In these institutions, faculty members in contingent roles are not a small supplement. They are the instructional backbone, which is why working conditions are inseparable from learning conditions. The Community College Research Center underscores the institutional stakes, stating that “a comprehensive vision for the improvement of community colleges must include improving the working conditions of adjunct faculty” (Bickerstaff & Chavarín, 2018, p. 1).

Adjunct work carries a strange dual identity. On the surface, the title suggests prestige, expertise, and a life in the mind, yet underneath it can conceal contingency and exclusion. One account captures this tension with immediate clarity: “Most people hear the title ‘adjunct professor’ and are impressed” (Berke, 2023, p. 2). That sentence is not a complaint about respect alone. It is a description of how language can mask labor reality and how the public story of faculty life can obscure the contract story that defines who is protected and who is not.

The gap between the title and the work is where professional identity is formed for many adjuncts. Identity emerges through teaching, through student relationships, and through the felt sense of being trusted with the most foundational courses, yet it is also shaped by institutional messages about who belongs. When adjuncts are missing from faculty meetings, absent from committee rosters, and excluded from office space, they receive a quiet lesson about status. The

message is often not spoken, but it is felt. Over time, that message becomes part of how adjuncts understand their place in the academic community and part of how they weigh whether they can stay.

Personal accounts reveal how structural instability is felt in the body. An adjunct professor writing at EdSurge describes finishing a term, submitting grades, and then receiving an email that reorders the future, “Just a heads up, she wrote, likely you'll have just one course next semester” (Berke, 2023, p. 1). Amid unpaid grading hours, ongoing student requests, and the pressure to secure income before the next semester begins, adjuncts juggle uncertainties. Professional identity becomes an emotional calculation between devotion to students and the need to survive for many adjuncts.

When course assignments are unstable, teaching preparation becomes unstable. When benefits depend on teaching load, health care becomes precarious. When scheduling is late, life itself becomes unstable. These conditions press on adjuncts quietly and constantly, and they also press on students, who often build relationships with instructors who are not sure they will be there next term. The result is a kind of relational interruption that is rarely discussed in institutional planning, but is felt in real classrooms.

Community college research echoes this uncertainty in language that is plain and direct. One instructor describes the daily reality, “My work schedule changes at the last minute” (Bickerstaff & Chavarín, 2018, p. 3). This issue is not only time, but power. When schedules change late, adjuncts lose the ability to plan other employment, plan caregiving, and plan their own professional development. Instability does not simply happen to adjuncts. It happens through institutional policies that treat instructional labor as adjustable.

Late course assignments and missing logistics can undermine teaching readiness and create anxiety. A faculty member explains that without adequate preparation supports they feel “stressed” and “rushed” (Bickerstaff & Chavarín, 2018, p. 4). This is the lived experience of academic work. Stress and rush are not personal traits. They are predictable outcomes of work designed without time, support, or stable information.

Instructors also describe how information is abundant yet inaccessible. One adjunct explains, “I had to figure a lot of things out, and it was a lot of me emailing my chair and asking her questions and her emailing me back” (Bickerstaff & Chavarín, 2018, p. 4). Another names the informational chaos of institutional communication, “I am inundated with emails about things that may be important, but I don't really know how important” (Bickerstaff & Chavarín, 2018, p. 4).

Together, these statements describe an information environment that produces uncertainty rather than clarity. It is not that information does not exist. It is that adjuncts must sort it, interpret it, and act on it without reliable structures that respect their limited time on campus. Determining what's important, deciphering what notifications mean without access to all of the information, and guessing what affects them directly and indirectly, is a daily task for adjuncts.

This information asymmetry shapes professional identity. When adjuncts must constantly ask basic questions, they are positioned as peripheral even when their teaching is central. When adjuncts miss a message because they teach at multiple campuses, the institution often reads the miss as individual failure rather than structural overload. Over time, this reinforces a cycle in which adjuncts are treated as less connected, then given fewer opportunities to connect, then evaluated as less connected. The burden of contingency becomes a story about the person rather than a story about the system.

Ethical reflection names the inequity that many experience but hesitate to describe. Bradner refuses euphemism and labels the adjunct system as a moral failing, stating, “The system is unjust and cruel” (Bradner, 2022, p. 2). She also identifies a key structural mechanism that keeps inequity in place, writing, “And no meaningful representation in university governance” (Bradner, 2022, p. 3). Later she makes the claim even broader, “The adjunct system is immoral by any philosophical measure” (Bradner, 2022, p. 10). Adjunct precarity is not an accident of scheduling but an institutional arrangement that distributes power and protection unevenly while expecting excellence from those it marginalizes.

The governance question is not abstract for adjuncts. When instructors do not have access to the places where policies are made, they cannot advocate without risk and cannot anticipate changes that affect their students. Governance exclusion shapes everything from whether instructors learn about new advising initiatives to whether they are invited to align syllabi with program pathways. It shapes whether adjuncts can help students plan effectively and whether they can feel that the institution stands with them rather than above them.

Some adjuncts describe autonomy as a valued part of their work, but autonomy can become a form of abandonment when it is paired with disconnection. One instructor captures this tension, “I love my job because of benign neglect. You leave me alone, and I pay you back by doing the best job I can” (Bickerstaff & Chavarín, 2018, p. 5). The sentence is offered as appreciation, yet it also reveals a structural problem. When being left alone is the main form of support, the institution receives good teaching while the instructor carries the full weight of preparation, student support, and policy navigation, with clear implications for burnout and well-being.

The contradictions in adjunct work show up most sharply in student interactions. Students often assume their instructor has the same authority and access as full-time faculty. They ask for academic planning, referrals, and guidance. In many cases, adjuncts respond with care, but their ability to connect students to resources depends on whether they have current information and clear pathways to communicate with staff. Research on adjunct faculty engagement points to persistent differences in access to information and involvement, including differences in awareness of student supports and campus processes (Bickerstaff & Ran, 2021, p. 2). When adjuncts are not intentionally included, students experience the consequences directly as confusion, delay, and uneven support.

The stress of those moments is intensified by the schedule structure of community colleges. Adjunct faculty are more likely to teach evenings and weekends, times when key offices are closed and when full-time colleagues may not be present (Bickerstaff & Ran, 2021, p. 2). This timing is not a small detail. It shapes who students can reach in the moment they are struggling. It also shapes whether an instructor can get rapid help with technology, classroom access, or student crises. Without intentional planning, the institution places the heaviest support burden on instructors working with the least institutional infrastructure.

Adjunct identity is also shaped through evaluation and recognition. A faculty member can deliver excellent teaching while still being treated as temporary, and that gap produces a quiet erosion of professional legitimacy. One instructor captures the emotional truth of this contradiction: “I love my department, love my chair, but the life of an adjunct sucks” (Bickerstaff & Chavarín, 2018, p. 6). Superficial recognition is not enough. What adjuncts need is structural respect.

Well-being is shaped by conditions rather than by personality. A systematic review of burnout among university professors identifies protective factors that are structural and relational, concluding that “collegial support, participative leadership, and job satisfaction functioned as protective elements” (Cadena-Povea et al., 2025, p. 1). Support and participation are not individual coping skills. They are outcomes of how institutions design communication, leadership, and shared decision making. Although this review centers university professors, its findings apply directly to adjunct faculty in community colleges, who often work with fewer protections and supports.

The patterns unveiled do not simply describe difficult working conditions. They reveal a recurring mismatch between institutional structures and the realities of adjunct labor. The instability, exclusion from governance, and lack of coordinated support described across empirical studies and personal narratives suggest that many colleges lack shared mechanisms for translating concern into action. It is within this gap that the adjunct faculty support toolkit introduced later in this dissertation is situated. Rather than offering individualized coping strategies or abstract best practices, the toolkit is designed as a structured, institution-facing resource that helps departments and colleges identify points of leverage for inclusion, communication, and support. Its purpose is not to resolve contingency itself, but to make visible the everyday practices through which marginalization is reproduced and to provide a common framework for addressing them collectively.

Institutional support is not only a matter of resources. It is also a matter of being seen. The Achieving the Dream report includes an adjunct voice that captures what exclusion feels like at the institutional level: “I was just excited to have an Adjunct Institute. [Before the Institute] I felt adrift” (Bickerstaff & Ran, 2020, p. 16). When instructors feel adrift, they are less able to

interpret institutional expectations, less able to connect students to services, and less able to plan with confidence.

The same report captures what changes when inclusion becomes real. An adjunct describes moving from invisibility to recognition in language that is both personal and structural, “I felt like I had a voice. I felt like people valued my opinion. I felt that people recognized me on a professional level, and that was a huge morale booster as a teacher” (Bickerstaff & Ran, 2020, p. 15). This is not sentimental language. It is evidence that belonging and voice are working conditions that shape morale, identity, and instructional confidence. These are precisely the dimensions the toolkit seeks to normalize at the departmental level.

A newer qualitative study reinforces how belonging and communication function as necessary conditions for meaningful professional development. Participants describe the absence of basic onboarding as a form of professional disrespect. One adjunct states, “There wasn't any training, any welcome aboard. I never even received a map of the college” (Arnold & Stroup, 2025, p. 4). The same study also captures the bluntness of preparation gaps, “Preparing for class? Nonexistent” (Arnold & Stroup, 2025, p. 4). Working conditions are teaching conditions. If institutions want consistent learning experiences, they must make preparation possible.

Departmental practices can either reproduce isolation or reduce it. The Science Education Resource Center offers guidance that should be read as a structural requirement, not a courtesy, “Regardless of the strategies undertaken, be intentional about efforts to include adjunct faculty in the life of the department” (Science Education Resource Center, n.d., p. 1). Intentionality matters because inclusion is not automatic. It is built through routine communication, accessible training, shared governance practices, and recognition that honors the work adjuncts already do.

A deeper look at faculty morale offers language for why these conditions matter beyond emotion. Hebert begins with a clear statement, “Faculty morale plays an important role in academic life” (Hebert, 2019, p. 1). He defines morale as “a cognitive, emotional, and motivational approach toward the work of the department and may be reflected by a sense of common purpose, group cohesion, and a sense of personal value in the organization” (Hebert, 2019, p. 1). Adjunct exclusion undermines common purpose and personal value, while inclusion strengthens both. Morale is not a private feeling. It is a signal of whether faculty are supported well enough to teach well and remain in their roles.

Recognition and belonging reshape confidence in ways that matter for teaching. In the SAGE 2YC evaluation chapter, change agents describe how professional community strengthens their willingness to lead and to share practice. One change agent states, “I feel more confident about my role with the greater and more diverse feedback from others” (Bragg et al., 2022, p. 10). Confidence is tied to community rather than to personal toughness. When institutions create communities of practice, they change the conditions under which faculty can grow, including adjunct faculty.

The SAGE 2YC chapter also distills its findings into lessons that are relevant to adjunct work across disciplines. It states, “Lesson #2: Change takes time” (Bragg et al., 2022, p. 11). It also states, “Lesson #3: No one changes alone” (Bragg et al., 2022, p. 11). Clarifying the institutional responsibility for sustainable improvement matters. Short-term contracts and isolated teaching make change harder. Structured learning communities and shared initiatives make change possible, and the toolkit is designed as one such institutional support.

“Simply put, adjuncts matter” (Layou et al., 2022, p. 10). This is both emotional and factual. Adjunct faculty are not supplementary, yet often student success is built on the labor of

people who are too often treated as temporary. When adjuncts matter, their working conditions matter, their voice matters, and their access to professional community matters.

Professional societies can support that community, especially for adjuncts who move between campuses. Research on disciplinary societies offers a direct claim that connects faculty support to student outcomes, stating, “Doing so has the potential to improve the professional lives of an underappreciated segment of the higher education workforce as well as positively influence outcomes for students” (Bickerstaff & Ran, 2021, p. 6). This statement is persuasive because it insists that faculty life and student life are linked. It also suggests that professional community is not a luxury but a condition that helps instructors sustain high-quality teaching across unstable appointments.

Equity must remain central in this conversation because contingency is not evenly distributed. AAUP data show disparities by gender and race in contingent employment (Colby, 2023, p. 2). A policy brief on equity-minded hiring adds detail about underrepresentation and its relationship to institutional culture, reporting that “Black, Latinx, and Native American faculty members account for only 5.0%, 5.2%, and 0.4% of the country's faculty population, respectively (10.6% in all)” (Wood & Harris, 2023, p. 4). The brief then names a core truth: “These issues are not a function of the candidates, but of institutional cultures” (Wood & Harris, 2023, p. 5). This chapter extends that claim beyond hiring, arguing that institutional culture also shapes who is mentored, who is asked to carry invisible service work, who is invited into decision making, and how inequities are concentrated in adjunct ranks.

Workforce pressure adds another layer to adjunct working conditions in community colleges. These institutions are asked to deliver transfer pathways, career preparation, and rapid credentials, often under severe financial constraints. A workforce development report states that

“completion rates are low,” and it also lists the related problems that follow when students do not complete credentials or complete credentials with limited value (Holzer et al., 2023, p. 3). This matters for adjunct faculty because completion is not only a student outcome. It is also a labor context. When colleges respond to performance pressure with cost-cutting rather than instructional investment, contingent labor expands and support structures thin.

Financial constraints also shape whether students can persist and whether faculty can support them. The same report explains, “The maximum value of Pell Grants, which can help low-income students finance tuition and fees and living expenses, is only about \$6,400 per year” (Holzer et al., 2023, p. 6). This sentence underscores that students often face a dual scarcity of money and time. Adjunct faculty see that scarcity daily in attendance patterns, missed assignments, and the quiet exhaustion students carry. Yet adjuncts are often excluded from the planning structures that determine student support, which limits their ability to intervene early and connect students to resources, a gap the toolkit later addresses by centering adjunct access to information and referral pathways.

Faculty voice and collective action are often part of the broader story of how academic communities seek to change these conditions. One online forum excerpt highlights how even access to dialogue can be gated. The page informs readers, “To continue reading for FREE, please sign in” (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2011, p. 1). That access barrier is a small example of a larger pattern. Information and voice are often gated, and adjuncts are often positioned as outsiders to the spaces where decisions and narratives are made. The toolkit responds in part by emphasizing local structures that invite adjunct voice into departmental conversations.

The toolkit developed in this dissertation responds to the convergence of these patterns. It does not ask adjuncts to absorb more work in the name of professionalism. Instead, it asks institutions to identify where their practices create stress, silence, and invisibility, then to redesign those practices with clarity and shared responsibility. It supports departments in building inclusive routines that do not depend on individual goodwill, including consistent onboarding, reliable communication, and pathways for adjunct participation that are compensated and respected.

The toolkit also helps prevent the common institutional habit of treating adjunct support as a series of isolated gestures. Instead, it encourages departments to connect onboarding, communication, and professional development to student support systems. It asks leaders to consider who receives information first, who receives it late, and who receives it in forms that are not usable. It asks how decisions about schedules and course assignments ripple into other employment and into the ability to maintain benefits. It asks how to honor autonomy while still providing enough structure to prevent the solitude of benign neglect.

The moral and practical imperative of this chapter is clear. Colleges depend on adjunct faculty, and that dependence brings obligations. Those obligations are not fulfilled by gratitude alone. They are fulfilled through stable communication, fair access to resources, participation in decisions that shape teaching conditions, and a professional community that sustains learning over time. Bradner's words remind us what happens when institutions do not meet those obligations: "The system is unjust and cruel" (Bradner, 2022, p. 2). The community college brief reminds us what institutions must do to improve: "A comprehensive vision for the improvement of community colleges must include improving the working conditions of adjunct faculty" (Bickerstaff & Chavarín, 2018, p. 1).

The evidence reviewed in this chapter converges on a clear conclusion. Adjunct faculty well-being, professional identity, and instructional quality are shaped primarily by institutional design rather than individual disposition. Governance structures, employment practices, and patterns of inclusion determine whether adjuncts experience their work as meaningful yet precarious or as valued and sustainable. While no single intervention can undo the structural conditions that produce contingency, intentional tools can support institutions in acting differently within those conditions. The adjunct faculty toolkit developed in this study emerges directly from the patterns documented here and is offered not as a remedy for burnout or a substitute for equitable labor policy, but as a practical mechanism for fostering transparency, shared responsibility, and informed action at the departmental and institutional level.

Put simply, agency grows when adjuncts are integrated into the everyday work of departments and colleges. Recognition follows when institutions align status and rewards with contributions. Well-being improves when stability and voice are present. Many adjuncts continue to find deep meaning in teaching and devote themselves to student success. Institutions must align structures with that devotion so that fulfillment does not depend on extraordinary personal effort under precarious conditions.

Key Takeaways

Chapter 3, Movement I: Understanding the System and Its Inequities

The instability, invisibility, and fragmentation experienced by adjuncts reveal how deeply institutional structures shape the emotional, intellectual, and logistical conditions of teaching itself. When those carrying most of the instructional load must navigate such conditions, it becomes clear that advancing student success requires seeing adjuncts not as peripheral labor but as essential change agents whose well-being is tied to the institution's future.

CHAPTER FOUR:
DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP AND ADJUNCT EMPOWERMENT

You can tell whether leadership is distributed by watching where decisions become real. The core test is simple. After the meeting ends, who can act, with what tools, and with what support? If the answer is only those with positional authority and paid time, then leadership remains centralized even if the language sounds collaborative. If the answer includes the people closest to students and the routines of teaching and support, then leadership is beginning to distribute in practice. This is the central claim. Shared governance can authorize decisions, yet distributed leadership changes what happens next in classrooms and student support pathways. When a college invests in practice routines rather than only in procedure, improvement becomes more likely and adjunct empowerment becomes more feasible.

On a typical afternoon, a committee agenda reads like a promise. Student success is listed. Equity gaps are listed. Course outcomes are listed. The language is familiar and sincere. The room is familiar too. A few full time faculty are present, a chair is present, someone from student services is present, and the people teaching most sections of the gateway course are mostly absent. That absence is not a mystery. It is built into schedules, compensation, and access. If the meeting ends with a summary that asks instructors to implement best practices, the college has produced motion without changing the conditions that make action possible.

You can test this immediately with a few questions that reveal power without drama. Who received the agenda in time to respond? Who was paid to attend? Who can place a new issue on the agenda next week?. Who can access the evidence that the meeting claims to value? Who will be held responsible for implementation, and who will be supported through time and

tools? These questions are not rhetorical flourishes. They are diagnostic tools. They show whether participation is procedural or consequential.

The work of adjunct empowerment begins when you stop treating this pattern as an unfortunate detail and start treating it as a design choice. The institution may not have intended exclusion, yet exclusion is produced. It is produced by meeting times that collide with teaching schedules. It is produced by service expectations that assume paid time. It is produced by information that travels through informal networks. These are leadership choices because they shape whose knowledge becomes part of decision making and whose knowledge remains trapped in private work.

Distributed leadership gives you a way to name this without reducing it to blame. It asks you to treat leadership as practice rather than position. Spillane states that distributed leadership is “first and foremost about leadership practice rather than leaders or their roles, functions, routines, and structures” (2005, p. 144). When you take that sentence seriously, you stop asking who should lead and you start asking where leadership is already happening and what conditions allow it to travel.

The move from position to practice changes what empowerment means. Empowerment is not a personal trait that some people possess. It is a set of conditions that makes agency feasible. Spillane frames leadership practice as a “product of the interactions of school leaders, followers, and their situation” (2005, p. 144). In a community college, the situation is not only a building and a schedule. It is the shared syllabus, the learning management system shell, the assessment calendar, the meeting time, the email list, the stipend policy, and the norm about whose work is seen as relevant. When these conditions invite participation, leadership becomes easier to enact. When they exclude participation, leadership becomes private and fragile.

A brief moment in a classroom shows why this matters. A student arrives late and apologizes. Another student sits quietly and does not speak for two weeks. A third student asks whether the assignment has to be typed, then looks down when the room reacts. The instructor decides whether the course will feel like a gate or a pathway. The instructor decides whether expectations are explained in a way that assumes prior college knowledge or in a way that teaches the hidden rules. The instructor decides whether feedback becomes a conversation or a verdict. These are decisions that shape belonging and learning. They are leadership decisions, even when they happen at night in a room that never appears on an org chart.

Now place that classroom moment next to a governance moment. A committee votes to increase transparency in a gateway course. The decision is recorded and a message goes out. The instructor then sits alone later that night rewriting an assignment prompt, guessing what transparency means, and hoping the revision is aligned with what other sections will do. The committee has authorized a value. The instructor has to invent a practice. That gap is where students experience inconsistency and where instructors experience fatigue. The college experiences both as failure, even though the failure is structural.

If leadership is practice, then the most important question becomes whether colleges build conditions that allow practice to be shared. A single instructor can revise a prompt and improve one section. A system can make that revision visible and repeatable so it improves many sections and persists across terms. This is the difference between isolated craftsmanship and institutional learning. It is also the difference between symbolic inclusion and structural inclusion.

Shared governance is often offered as the mechanism that ensures the right people influence decisions. Shared governance emphasizes formal authority, representation, committees,

councils, and roles. Schuetz defines shared governance as “a social system of self government wherein decision making responsibility is shared among those affected by the decisions” (1999, p. 2). Read the definition slowly. It does not say those who have the most seniority. It does not say those who have release time. It says those affected. In community colleges, adjunct faculty are affected by decisions about curriculum, scheduling, modality, assessment expectations, evaluation practices, and professional development access. Students are affected by decisions about advising, tutoring, and communication routines. Staff are affected by decisions about service delivery and workload. A shared governance system aligned with its own definition cannot treat adjunct inclusion as optional.

Schuetz also names why shared governance often fails to meet its ideal. “The collegial model reflects more rhetoric than reality” (Schuetz, 1999, p. 3). This sentence is not an attack. It is a description of an institutional pattern. Committees can exist and still exclude people through meeting times, unpaid service expectations, and information pathways that depend on informal networks. Once these gates exist, participation becomes a matter of personal sacrifice rather than institutional design.

Schuetz describes predictable tensions that emerge when governance structures are fragile. Shared governance can create divisiveness and turf conflict, fragment budgets, promote distrust and resistance to change, and slow decisions (Schuetz, 1999, p. 4). These tensions are often used to justify centralization. Yet they can also be read as evidence that governance needs redesign. When participation is inaccessible, decisions feel imposed and resistance grows. When participation is tokenized, conflict becomes more likely because groups do not trust the process. A college does not escape these dynamics by shrinking participation. It escapes them by designing participation pathways that are feasible and meaningful.

The limits of shared governance are easiest to see when you measure it against student experience. Governance can authorize priorities. It cannot, by itself, create the routines that carry those priorities into daily practice. Students do not experience recommendations. Students experience what happens in the next class session. Students experience whether expectations are clear, whether feedback helps them improve, and whether support pathways are usable. When shared governance remains disconnected from practice routines, leadership stays concentrated in formal structures and student experience stays uneven.

Distributed leadership becomes persuasive at this point because it refuses to treat leadership as something that only happens in formal rooms. It asks you to look at how work is coordinated and how influence is produced in real time. Spillane offers a criterion that should sit at the center of adjunct empowerment design. “What matters for instructional improvement and student achievement is not that leadership is distributed, but how it is distributed” (2005, p. 149). You can apply this criterion as a practical test. Who has access to the tools of improvement? Who has time to participate? Who has legitimate pathways to influence?

Woods, Bennett, Harvey, and Wise provide language for what meaningful distribution looks like. Their review highlights Gronn’s concept of “concertive action” (Woods et al., 2004, p. 441). Concertive action is the added capacity created when people pool initiative and expertise so the result becomes more than the sum of individual effort. You see concertive action when instructors coordinate across sections, share materials, and refine teaching strategies based on what students actually do. One instructor revises an assignment prompt after noticing repeated misunderstandings. Another instructor tests the revision and adds a work relevant example. Another instructor adds a short reflection that helps students name what they did and why it

matters. The leadership is not in a single person's insight. The leadership is in the shared routine that makes insight transferable.

Woods and colleagues also point toward an essential boundary shift. They connect openness of leadership boundaries to the idea that distinct perspectives and capabilities are spread throughout the organization and its stakeholders (Woods et al., 2004, p. 442). Adjunct empowerment depends on this shift. Adjunct instructors carry knowledge of student experience that is often invisible to decision makers. When boundaries remain closed, that knowledge stays trapped in private classrooms. When boundaries open, the college gains a wider set of perspectives for improvement.

Power is the throughline that determines whether this boundary shift becomes real. The higher education literature warns that distributed leadership language can be adopted without redistributing influence. Gosling, Bolden, and Petrov argue that leadership discourse can "mask the concentration of influence with those who have control of budgets" (2009, p. 300). Their question is plain and useful. "How is power distributed?" (Gosling et al., 2009, p. 307). You can use it as a test. Who controls access to paid time for the work. Who controls access to professional learning. Who controls the flow of information. Who controls which work becomes protected and sustained.

Their critique becomes sharper in a sentence that belongs in the center of any toolkit claim. "Distributed leadership may be more powerful as a rhetorical device than as an accurate description of leadership practice" (Gosling et al., 2009, p. 307). The sentence is not a reason to abandon distributed leadership. It is a reason to build observable pathways that make distribution visible. You cannot solve a power problem with language. You solve it with redesigned routines.

Shared leadership research complements distributed leadership by focusing explicitly on infrastructure. Kezar and Holcombe summarize enabling conditions and write that “conditions that promote and sustain shared leadership include team empowerment, supportive vertical or hierarchical leaders, autonomy, shared purpose or goal, external coaching, accountability structures, interdependence, fairness of rewards, and shared cognition” (2017, p. 5). This list is persuasive because it names what has to be built. Team empowerment is not an attitude. It is delegated authority and access to resources. Fairness of rewards is not a moral claim. It is the difference between participation as privilege and participation as normal work.

Kezar and Holcombe also offer a sentence that should be read as a direct invitation to positional leaders. “For colleges and universities to truly reap the benefits of more collaborative forms of leadership, institutional decision makers should be willing to thoughtfully reexamine their own conceptions of what it means to be a successful leader” (2017, p. 22). Reexamination becomes visible when meeting design changes, when compensation policies change, and when information access is built into routine communication.

Change management research reinforces why this cannot be a one time initiative. Kotter warns that “skipping steps creates only the illusion of speed and never produces a satisfying result” (1995, p. 1). You can create the illusion of speed by convening a committee and hosting a workshop. You create real change by redesigning routines so practice can be tried, refined, and shared across terms. Kotter also emphasizes coalitions and argues that change requires a guiding coalition with enough power to lead (Kotter, 1995, p. 3). In a community college, a coalition that excludes adjunct instructors will struggle to carry change into the courses where students experience the institution.

A coalition becomes real when you can see what it does. It convenes around a specific challenge and it produces a shared way of working. It makes decisions that protect time for the work. It creates a pathway for evidence to move from classrooms into decisions. It creates a pathway for decisions to move back into classrooms as shared routines. A coalition that exists only as a list of names will not do this. A coalition that is designed with compensated roles and clear routines can.

Evidence from community colleges shows what it looks like when institutions build conditions for faculty to act as change agents. Bragg and colleagues describe an intentional cycle of change and report that faculty change agents increased evidence-based teaching and expanded leadership roles (2022, p. 215). The evaluation chapter offers two short statements that function as design requirements. “Lesson #2: Change takes time” (Bragg et al., 2022, p. 225). “Lesson #3: No one changes alone” (Bragg et al., 2022, p. 225). These are not slogans. They describe what has to be built if change is going to persist.

Participant voices show what this environment feels like. One change agent described the virtual format and idea sharing as “a huge benefit” (Bragg et al., 2022, p. 218). Another described becoming “more confident, more informed, more connected, and more capable” (Bragg et al., 2022, p. 220). A networking reflection describes the practical value of community, “the network has helped me find answers or given me ideas in a much more efficient way” (Bragg et al., 2022, p. 224). These lines describe leadership development as a shift in access and capacity rather than a trait.

Layou and colleagues offer the clearest statement of why adjunct empowerment belongs at the center of this work. “Simply put, adjuncts matter” (2022, p. 142). Their chapter grounds this claim in structural detail, noting limited access to orientation, professional development,

technology support, and meeting accommodations (Layou et al., 2022, p. 134). When adjunct instructors are structurally excluded from the supports that allow professional learning and governance participation, inclusion remains rhetorical.

Layou and colleagues show that empowerment is enabled by legitimacy. A participant described how support worked, saying, “SAGE 2YC also gave me the permission and confidence to take action, and their backing lent legitimacy to my efforts” (Layou et al., 2022, p. 139). Another participant described support as “incredibly powerful” and emphasized that it was “tangible and functional” (Layou et al., 2022, p. 136). These phrases point toward design. Tangible and functional support is built through roles, time, compensation, and structured community.

Layou and colleagues include a sentence that captures the ethical seriousness of adjunct labor while remaining grounded in professionalism. “Though my labor may be contingent, my devotion to my students is not” (2022, p. 144). The persuasion is in the mismatch. Devotion is present. Structure is contingent. The institution has to decide whether it will align structures with the seriousness of the work.

Faculty role design scholarship supports this alignment by treating working conditions as part of institutional integrity. Kezar and Maxey describe equity in concrete terms and include access to “all of the information and tools needed for faculty members to do their jobs” (2015, p. 37). They also describe collegiality as a structure that respects contributions and facilitates involvement in governance and collaboration (Kezar & Maxey, 2015, p. 37). Information access and tools are conditions for competent practice and meaningful participation.

Research on pedagogical change adds another layer by connecting distributed leadership to instructional routines. Sasson and colleagues report “a significant positive correlation”

between distributed leadership and assimilation of a pedagogical vision (2022, p. 9). They also report that formative assessment and inquiry learning strengthened the relationship (Sasson et al., 2022, p. 11). This suggests that leadership becomes real when it is tied to shared teaching routines and when teachers have structures to investigate practice together. Short term discomfort can weaken change, which suggests that support and time are not optional.

Marks offers a question that keeps leadership development grounded in purpose rather than service. “Leadership development for what?” (Marks, 2015, p. 17). The question matters because adjunct inclusion can become volunteer labor without influence if institutions do not design pathways into consequential work. Marks emphasizes sustained engagement and suggests that sustained relationships are more likely to nurture “future leaders prepared to face complex issues” (Marks, 2015, p. 29). Adjunct leadership development also requires sustained opportunity rather than isolated invitations.

Moon provides language that normalizes bottom up leadership as legitimate change making. “Changemakers are quiet, everyday leaders” (Moon, 2025, p. 137). Quiet leadership looks like a revised assignment prompt, a clearer rubric, a new feedback routine, or a consistent way to refer students to support. It looks like small wins that accumulate. Moon captures the accumulation logic in a sentence that can anchor toolkit design, “In short, as the title of this article states, change making makes change” (Moon, 2025, p. 117). Change becomes possible when people have tools, community, and permission.

How does change move in a college where many instructors are paid for classroom time only? If improvement requires planning, coordination, and reflection, then improvement requires time. When time is not protected, the work moves into evenings and weekends, and it becomes a

privilege for those who can afford to donate labor. That is not a neutral outcome. It is a leadership outcome.

You can see the cost in a simple scene. An adjunct instructor finishes class, answers questions in the hallway, then drives to another campus. There is no office to meet students and no paid hour to meet colleagues. A message arrives inviting faculty to a curriculum meeting at 2 p.m. on a weekday. The invitation can be sincere and still be impossible.

This is where the toolkit becomes a leadership technology rather than a resource library. A leadership technology is an artifact that changes what people can do together. It changes the situation. Distributed leadership depends on the situation, including tools and routines (Spillane, 2005, p. 144). A toolkit becomes part of that situation when it makes leadership practice visible, accessible, legitimate, and repeatable.

You can feel the difference between a resource library and a leadership technology in what happens the first week it is used. A library sits on a shelf and waits for motivation. A shared repository (Appendix B) changes the way work is organized. It changes what counts as participation, and it changes how learning is captured so it can travel.

A toolkit (Appendix C) that functions as leadership technology turns those questions into visible maps. The map is not a metaphor. It is a record of where decisions live. Curriculum decisions may live in a curriculum committee. Scheduling decisions may live in a program chair meeting. Assessment decisions may live in an accreditation workgroup. Student support decisions may live in a cross unit council. The map also shows which decisions directly shape the daily work of adjunct instructors. When you see the map, you can see where voice is missing and where practice is being shaped without the people who will implement it.

Now, reimagine this scene and how visibility changes the next step. A department discovers that decisions about the gateway course are made in a meeting that meets at 2 p.m. Adjunct instructors teach at that time. The problem is not lack of interest. The problem is feasibility. The first redesign is not a new committee. The first redesign is a participation pathway. A virtual option is built into the routine. An asynchronous input window is built into the routine. A summary with decisions and rationales is built into the routine. When this happens, participation shifts from volunteerism to access.

This kind of redesign is not cosmetic. Schuetz's warning about collegial rhetoric becomes visible in the difference between a meeting that invites adjunct voices in principle and a meeting that makes contribution possible in practice (Schuetz, 1999, p. 3). The pathway is the work. Without the pathway, governance remains a promise.

The toolkit also changes participation by distributing roles. One person facilitates. Another person documents meetings and changes. Another curates evidence. Another listens for patterns and names them back to the group. These are not minor tasks. They are the mechanics of shared cognition. Kezar and Holcombe list shared cognition and accountability structures among the conditions that sustain shared leadership (2017, p. 5). A toolkit makes shared cognition more likely because it gives groups a shared script for how to interpret evidence and how to decide what to do next.

Now, picture how roles change legitimacy. An adjunct instructor serves as the evidence curator for a single cycle. The task is bound. The task is compensated. The instructor brings anonymized student work to the group and highlights a repeated misunderstanding. The group revises the prompt together. The next term, a different instructor takes the role and the routine

continues. Leadership becomes a pattern rather than a person. The institution has not changed titles, yet it has changed who can act and how learning travels.

This is where the evidence from faculty change agent work matters. Bragg and colleagues describe an intentional cycle of change and report that faculty change agents increased evidence-based teaching and expanded leadership roles (Bragg et al., 2022, p. 215). Their evaluation does not attribute change to a single leader. It attributes change to a structure of community and time. When they write that change takes time and that no one changes alone, they are describing the infrastructure that a toolkit must help create (Bragg et al., 2022, p. 225).

The participant voices in that work show what infrastructure feels like. A change agent described the virtual format and idea sharing as a huge benefit (Bragg et al., 2022, p. 218). Another described becoming more confident, more informed, more connected, and more capable (Bragg et al., 2022, p. 220). A networking reflection shows how a network reduces friction, “the network has helped me find answers or given me ideas in a much more efficient way” (Bragg et al., 2022, p. 224). A toolkit can function as the local version of that network because it provides shared protocols that lower the cost of starting.

Now, imagine what makes the mechanism concrete. A group runs a single learning conversation focused on one assignment. The group begins with student work, not with blame. They ask what students seem to think the prompt is asking. They ask where the hidden rules are implicit. They revise the prompt and create a short checklist. They pilot the revision across sections for two weeks. They reconvene and compare student work. The change is small enough to try and meaningful enough to learn from. It is also teachable. It can be repeated next term.

This is how leadership travels through routines rather than meetings. It is also how power becomes visible. Who had time to meet? Who was compensated? Who had access to student

work samples? Who had permission to test a change? When the answers include adjunct instructors, leadership is being distributed in practice.

Layou and colleagues show why legitimacy is central to adjunct participation. When an adjunct participant says backing lent legitimacy to their efforts, the statement describes a structural condition that changed reception on campus (Layou et al., 2022, p. 139). When another participant describes support as tangible and functional, the statement implies that participation was designed to fit real schedules (Layou et al., 2022, p. 136). A toolkit that creates role clarity, documentation routines, and visible artifacts can help distribute legitimacy even before formal authority shifts.

Let's envision how artifacts convert participation into influence. A community of practice produces a one page summary of what was tried, what student work showed, and what the group recommends next. The summary is not a personal opinion. It is a documented learning artifact. It goes to the curriculum committee. The committee now has evidence of practice rather than an abstract proposal. Governance can do its job better because it is receiving tested practice.

This is also where Marks's question functions as a safeguard. Leadership development for what prevents the college from turning adjunct participation into volunteer service without influence (Marks, 2015, p. 17). When the work produces artifacts that enter decision pathways, leadership development becomes connected to institutional change capacity rather than to symbolic participation.

The toolkit also supports accumulation. A log of small wins records what was tried, what changed, and what was learned. The log is not a celebration. It is institutional memory. It keeps learning from disappearing at the end of the term. This aligns with Moon's emphasis on accumulation and with the idea that change making makes change (Moon, 2025, p. 117). It also

responds to Kotter's warning about the illusion of speed, since the log supports sustained steps that build momentum over time (Kotter, 1995, p. 1).

Power remains the throughline. If a college wants distributed leadership, it has to decide whether leadership work will be treated as work. That means compensation for participation, access to information and tools, and predictable pathways for influence. Kezar and Maxey describe equity in terms that include access to information and tools needed to do the job (Kezar & Maxey, 2015, p. 37). When adjunct instructors lack access, leadership cannot be distributed in practice.

The toolkit therefore strengthens governance by making it more connected to practice. It does not replace shared governance. It prepares governance to function as synthesis and scaling rather than as the only engine of leadership. Shared governance authorizes. Distributed leadership changes what happens next. The repeated test remains the same. After the meeting ends, who can act, with what tools, and with what support.

You can now see why a toolkit belongs in this argument and why it should be written as a pathway rather than a list. A toolkit does not ask you to adopt distributed leadership as a belief before you begin. It enables you to enact it through everyday work. It leads by reframing leadership as practice rather than position. It leads by creating safe entry points for participation. It leads by distributing legitimacy before formal authority changes. It leads by making leadership travel through routines rather than meetings. It leads by keeping change anchored in teaching and student experience. It leads by accumulating small wins into institutional learning. It leads by bridging practice into formal structures so shared governance can function better.

The toolkit begins by making leadership practice visible. It prompts reflection on routine decisions that are already being made by adjuncts, staff, and faculty, such as course design,

assessment interpretation, and student support pathways. This move aligns with a distributed view that treats leadership as practice produced in interaction rather than role assignment (Spillane, 2005, p. 144). When people recognize leadership as something they are already doing, resistance drops. The work feels less like a confrontation and more like an invitation to learn together.

The toolkit then designs participation before asking for commitment. It offers bounded roles such as facilitator, contributor, observer, or documenter. It uses short cycles, such as a single learning conversation or a pilot activity. It makes expectations explicit so participants know what counts as contribution. In a system where adjunct participation is constrained by unpaid time, bounded and compensated roles can convert good intent into feasible participation.

This toolkit also distributes legitimacy before authority. It names participants as contributors or change agents within the process. It provides shared language that can be used across roles. It creates visible artifacts such as notes, summaries, and action plans that make work legible. These artifacts matter because legitimacy in organizations is often granted through documentation and visibility. Layou and colleagues show that backing that lends legitimacy changes what is possible (Layou et al., 2022, p. 139). A toolkit that produces visible artifacts gives people something to point to that is larger than personal advocacy.

This toolkit makes leadership travel through routines rather than meetings. It embeds leadership into learning conversations, reflection protocols, action planning cycles, and feedback loops. It provides facilitation guides that rotate roles. It encourages shared interpretation of evidence rather than individual reporting. It builds habits of reflection that can persist without formal oversight. When leadership travels through routine practice, it no longer depends on who is present in a room.

This toolkit also keeps leadership anchored in teaching and student experience. The work begins with student experience, not abstract policy. It uses teaching and assessment artifacts as shared reference points. It encourages experimentation that is small enough to try and meaningful enough to learn from. This is where bottom up leadership becomes credible. It is grounded in professional identity as educators and in the daily reality of student learning.

This toolkit accumulates small wins into institutional learning. A revised assignment prompt, a clearer rubric, a more consistent referral routine, and a more accessible meeting design can each be a small win. When these wins are documented and shared, they become evidence of change capacity. They also create a narrative that can later inform larger decisions. This aligns with the change agent evidence that no one changes alone and that change takes time (Bragg et al., 2022, p. 225). It aligns with Moon's emphasis on accumulation as a change mechanism (Moon, 2025, p. 117).

This toolkit bridges bottom up practice to formal structures. It does not replace shared governance. It prepares the ground for governance to function better. When distributed leadership practices are established, shared governance bodies receive clearer input and proposals grounded in tested practice. Participation feels less symbolic and more informed. Governance becomes a site of synthesis rather than the sole engine of leadership. Distributed leadership feeds governance instead of competing with it.

The distinction is straightforward but essential, and it bears repeating because it defines the argument itself. Shared governance determines *who* holds decision-making authority, while distributed leadership shapes *how* those decisions transform practice. When a college invests only in governance structures, the table, it risks leaving everyday practice untouched. Yet when it

invests in the routines that shape practice, it builds a living bridge between institutional decisions and the student experience.

The literature suggests that when institutions choose where to invest design effort, distributed and bottom up leadership produces more instructional improvement, greater equity of participation, and stronger change capacity than reliance on shared governance alone. This conclusion follows from Schuetz's warning about rhetoric (Schuetz, 1999, p. 3). It follows from Gosling and colleagues' question about power distribution (Gosling et al., 2009, p. 307). It follows from Bragg and colleagues' lesson that no one changes alone (Bragg et al., 2022, p. 225). Shared governance is not unnecessary. It is insufficient. Without routines that make practice change possible, governance remains a promise.

The stakes are not abstract. When leadership remains symbolic, students experience inconsistency. They experience unclear expectations and uneven support. Adjunct faculty experience extraction of labor without influence, and the institution experiences reform fatigue. When leadership becomes distributed through practice, students experience coherence and clearer pathways. Adjunct faculty experience legitimacy and structured participation. The institution experiences learning that accumulates rather than resets.

You return then to the classroom where the institution is lived. A student asks what the assignment is asking for. This time the instructor is not alone in deciding how to clarify. The instructor is part of a shared practice community that has examined student work, refined prompts, revised feedback routines, and designed clearer pathways to support. The student experiences the institution not as a list of committee statements but as a coherent set of practices that makes success more possible. That is leadership as practice. That is why distributed leadership and bottom up change matter.

Key Takeaways

Chapter 4, Movement II: Redesigning Faculty Roles and Institutional Structures

The everyday routines, relationships, and decision-making patterns on a campus reveal who is permitted to lead and whose expertise quietly shapes the institution without acknowledgment. When adjuncts already enact the core practices of distributed leadership, coordinating courses, mentoring colleagues, adapting curricula, their exclusion from formal leadership structures becomes a missed opportunity to recognize them as essential change agents capable of moving the institution toward equity and coherence.

CHAPTER FIVE:
FACULTY COLLABORATION, PEER MENTORING, AND COMMUNITY BUILDING

Faculty collaboration, peer mentoring, and community building sit at the heart of what it means to take adjunct faculty seriously as educators and as colleagues. Peer mentoring and communities of practice are not extras. They are the scaffolding that makes reflective teaching possible and the everyday antidote to isolation for adjunct faculty in community colleges.

Evidence across empirical studies, program cases, and first-person narratives points in one direction: sustained, relational structures where colleagues learn together increase instructional coherence and confidence, elevate ground-level voices, and cultivate collective resilience (Ortiz, Rodesiler, Latz, & Mulvihill, 2021). The essential question is how these structures foster reflective teaching and resilience among adjuncts, and the research question is which approaches and designs most effectively reduce professional isolation and promote collaboration in two-year colleges.

Collaboration among adjunct and full-time faculty can take many forms, small working groups focused on a single gateway course, cross-section communities of practice that meet around shared assignments and student work, and whole-department conversations that align expectations across developmental, transfer, and workforce pathways. Some of these structures are formal, regularly scheduled faculty learning communities, course design teams with clear agendas and minutes, while others are intentionally informal, such as brown-bag conversations or short virtual huddles before a major assignment launches.

Peer mentoring follows a similar continuum. New adjuncts may be paired with experienced colleagues teaching the same course, with attention to similar schedules, modalities,

and student populations so that questions and examples are immediately relevant. More advanced mentoring circles can bring together instructors with complementary strengths. For example, groups may include one who is strong in technology, another in multilingual pedagogy, another in trauma-informed practice, so that each member both gives and receives support.

Across these arrangements, what builds community is the repeated experience of showing up. Working on real problems together, and seeing one's questions and insights taken seriously creates a group of stakeholders. Over time, these patterns of shared work turn isolated classrooms into a network of relationships and routines where adjunct faculty recognize themselves as part of something larger than a single course or contract.

When collaboration is missing, students experience the institution as a set of disconnected rooms with different rules. When collaboration is present, students experience coherent pathways, clearer feedback, and fewer hidden barriers. In isolation, the instructor invents clarity alone, hoping it matches what other sections require. In a connected department, that clarity has already been negotiated through shared rubrics, shared examples, and shared ideas.

Collaboration, when made possible, becomes the quiet infrastructure that allows reflective teaching to be more than private reflection. Reflective teaching shows up when instructors test small changes, examine evidence from student work, and revise routines with intention. Those moves are easier to sustain when they happen in community rather than in solitude. Communities of practice turn isolated observations into collective patterns and they turn collective patterns into shared revisions. The result is not sameness, it is coherence that reduces accidental variation and protects purposeful responsiveness.

Professional learning literature explains why community matters for practice change. Wenger describes learning as a “process of participation in communities of practice” rather than a simple transfer of information (Wenger, 1998). Participation shifts the focus from receiving tips to doing the work together. In a participatory model, instructors bring real artifacts, compare decisions, and build shared language for what quality looks like. This participation is a direct counter to the isolation that often defines adjunct teaching.

Collaboration is also a matter of access to shared language. Cromwell, Fleming, Forshey, and Fleming describe joint learning as a way to “level the playing field” for dialogue about practice (Cromwell, Fleming, Forshey, & Fleming, 2024, pp. 160 to 161). Shared vocabulary reduces the hidden costs of being an outsider in curriculum conversations. Shared vocabulary also reduces the hidden costs students pay when each section names expectations differently. A shared lexicon supports transfer across courses and supports clearer instruction in multilingual and first generation classrooms.

The patterns of isolation are easy to recognize in daily routines. Adjunct instructors often teach at multiple campuses and in compressed time blocks, so hallway conversations and midday meetings do not reach them. Course assignments may arrive late, leaving little time to coordinate expectations with colleagues. Information arrives in scattered emails without a stable place to locate current templates and student support procedures. These conditions are not random, they are produced by institutional design choices that concentrate participation in spaces that adjunct schedules cannot access.

A different design choice makes collaboration feasible. Predictable routines create a doorway into a community that does not depend on luck or personal connections. A consistent meeting rhythm signals that collaboration is part of professional life rather than an occasional

event. A stable repository signals that teaching materials and institutional guidance have a home that can be accessed at any hour. Compensation or time credit signals that collaboration is treated as work rather than as volunteer service. These choices change who can participate and whose knowledge becomes part of the collective.

Research on curriculum aligned professional development clarifies why the most effective communities stay close to the curriculum. Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi, and Gallagher emphasize coherence between learning experiences and the materials teachers implement, and they identify planning time as a primary lever for enactment (2007). In community colleges, planning time is often the scarce resource, especially for adjuncts who are paid primarily for classroom hours. Communities of practice make planning time visible and shared. They allow instructors to leave meetings with ready-to-teach materials rather than with abstract intentions.

Design features determine whether new practices travel from talk to classrooms. Research on curriculum aligned professional development shows that coherence between learning experiences and the materials teachers must implement is crucial. Alignment increases reported implementation, and active learning routines such as analyzing student work and rehearsing strategies matter as well. Time to plan during and after sessions is a primary lever for enactment, because instructors leave with ready to teach assignments and instructional sequences rather than abstract ideas (Penuel et al., 2007, pp. 925, 942).

Creating a virtual community (Appendix B) respects the realities of adjunct work. It respects the fact that many instructors grade late at night and prepare between commutes. It respects the fact that student questions arrive when offices are closed. It also respects the fact that instructors cannot implement a new approach without time to design it. Access to planning and

learning materials when time allows is not a convenience, it is an equity move that prevents professional learning from becoming a time restraint and obstacle to other commitments.

Peer mentoring provides an entry point into this shared work. Mentoring makes the institution legible, especially for instructors who do not have daily access to department life. Mentoring can provide a map of course norms, a path to current materials, and a script for connecting students to tutoring, advising, and accessibility support. Mentoring also provides a safe place to ask questions and to name uncertainty without fear. When mentoring is intentional, access becomes reliable rather than dependent on informal networks.

Evidence from peer communities shows how mentoring can cultivate professional identity. Adkisson and colleagues describe “communities of support” that “cultivated their professional identities, learn[ed] and practice[d] leadership skills, and [found] their scholarly voices” (Adkisson et al., 2020, p. 116). Adjunct instructors often carry high responsibility with limited institutional voice, so identity and voice can feel fragile. A mentoring circle offers a place where expertise is seen and where leadership can be practiced in bounded roles. This shifts the emotional grammar of the job from solitude to shared purpose.

Mentoring must match the constraints adjuncts face. Arnold and Stroup report that adjuncts “highly value the training that they have received from their institution” when it provides concrete strategies tied to their classrooms (Arnold & Stroup, 2025, p. 4). Training that is generic or scheduled at inaccessible times does not reach practice. Mentoring that is embedded in the courses adjuncts teach most often reaches practice. Meeting options that include evenings, weekends, and virtual access honor adjunct schedules and make participation realistic.

Participation becomes more equitable when access is designed rather than assumed. Short sessions tied to active course work reduce the cost of attendance. A repository keeps materials

available when instructors prepare outside office hours. Compensation or time credit acknowledges that participation requires time and labor. These design choices prevent mentoring from becoming another unpaid expectation. They also signal that mentoring is part of professional infrastructure.

Communities of practice extend mentoring by anchoring relationships in joint work over time. The work becomes more than mutual encouragement. It becomes shared inquiry grounded in student artifacts and in recurring assignments. Lieberman and Pointer Mace describe professional learning that is “fragmented and disconnected from classroom realities” and argue for communities that evolve with collective construction of professional knowledge (Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008, pp. 228, 231). Sustained community creates space for teachers to teach teachers.

Sustained participation also prevents professional learning from resetting each term. A repeated cycle of planning, enactment, and reflection supports accumulation of instructional knowledge. The shared repertoire grows when artifacts are revised and then reused across sections. Implementation becomes more likely when planning time is protected and tied to the next unit (Penuel et al., 2007). The result is a culture where improvement is collective rather than individual.

Empirical evidence also shows that community effects depend on design. Gehrke and Kezar found that engagement that “builds interpersonal connections and trust” is associated with shifts in departmental culture (Gehrke & Kezar, 2017, p. 825). They also found that communities offering “leadership opportunities, resources oriented toward reform, and public venues to share work” are linked with broader cultural changes that support instructional improvement (Gehrke

& Kezar, 2017, p. 827). Trust allows instructors to bring messy work into the room. Leadership opportunities allow adjunct knowledge to influence decisions beyond the community.

Trust is built through routine, not through rhetoric. A meeting can begin with a short round where each instructor names one success and one puzzle. The group can keep attention on artifacts rather than on personal performance. The group can protect confidentiality so the space remains a learning space. These routines make it safer to share student work and to admit uncertainty. Trust then becomes the condition that makes reflective teaching visible and shared.

A central benefit of community is shared language that students can hear and use. When rubric terms match teaching language, students can revise with clarity. When feedback phrases are aligned across sections, students encounter consistent guidance. When expectations are explained in similar ways across modalities, students can transfer strategies from online to face to face sections. Shared language is therefore an instructional equity move.

Communities of practice can operationalize shared language through calibration routines. Faculty can independently review a small set of anonymized student samples, score them with a shared rubric, and compare decisions. Differences become information about rubric clarity and about instructional emphasis. The group then revises rubric language for clarity and aligns feedback phrases. Calibration supports fairness for students and reduces grading anxiety for instructors.

Coherence is not the same as uniformity, and communities can protect that distinction. A shared rubric can be stable while examples and scaffolds remain flexible. A shared assignment purpose can be consistent while topics invite students to connect to their lives. A shared feedback phrase bank can provide consistency while instructors add voice and nuance. Coherence reduces

accidental barriers, and flexibility preserves responsive teaching. Communities make it possible to hold both.

A practical collaboration cycle can be built around a mentoring circle for a gateway course. Three to eight instructors who teach the same course form a cohort that includes adjunct and full time faculty. The cohort meets every two weeks for sixty minutes with a consistent agenda. Sessions alternate between a case clinic and a planning session. Each meeting produces an artifact that is posted to a shared repository organized by unit.

A practical blueprint begins with mentoring circles that include adjunct and full time faculty who teach the same gateway course. The group meets every two weeks for sixty minutes, alternating case clinics and planning sessions. Case clinics invite a specific classroom problem, such as uneven engagement in discussion boards or persistent confusion about thesis statements, and the group analyzes student artifacts, proposes strategies, and rehearses feedback.

Planning sessions turn to upcoming units, revised prompts, and coordinated rubrics. Each meeting produces artifacts that are added to a shared repository organized by unit. The repository becomes a living repertoire that supports adjuncts who teach at multiple sites and who need quick access to ready to use materials (Penuel et al., 2007, p. 942). These deliverables also create common ground across disciplines and departments.

The blueprint continues with visible leadership roles. Facilitators rotate across adjunct and full time instructors, and a liaison shares insights with departments. Colleges provide modest stipends or time credits for facilitators and participants. Cross campus virtual sessions connect instructors who teach at different locations. Communities center care explicitly by inviting short narratives that surface strategies for supporting students through crisis without lowering standards.

Recognition is built into campus communications by featuring adjunct artifacts and showcasing innovations in program meetings. These routines align with findings on coherence, planning time, shared language, and leadership visibility, and they create tangible gains in instructional coordination (Cromwell et al., 2024, p. 161; Gehrke & Kezar, 2017, p. 827; Penuel et al., 2007, p. 925).

A case clinic begins with a concrete dilemma and a piece of evidence. An instructor may bring a prompt that students consistently misread or a sample set of drafts showing the same misunderstanding. The group asks what students appear to think the task requires and where the hidden rules are embedded. The group identifies one change to test and rehearses language for instruction and feedback. The rehearsal matters since it gives instructors usable phrasing for the next class meeting.

A planning session turns the next unit into shared design work. Faculty revise prompt wording for clarity and align rubric language to match the purpose of the task. Faculty create a brief checklist that names required moves and a brief model that illustrates the key move. The faculty also build a short feedback phrase bank aligned to rubric criteria. Planning inside the meeting protects adjunct time and increases the likelihood that changes will be enacted.

The repository (Appendix B) is the bridge that allows learning to travel. A repository can store the revised prompt, rubric, checklist, model, and feedback phrases. A repository can also store a short reflection on what changed and what evidence informed the change. A reflection such as “worked well with multilingual students when scaffolded with a model” captures a transferable principle from practice. A reflection such as “students responded with more engagement when we connected this prompt to their work schedules” captures an equity minded design move.

Hybrid participation is essential for adjunct inclusion. Meetings can offer a virtual option and a brief recorded summary. An asynchronous input window can allow instructors to comment on a prompt or rubric before the live meeting. These pathways reduce the transaction costs of participation for faculty who commute between campuses. Hybrid design also prevents collaboration from becoming a privilege limited to those with daytime availability.

External guidance reinforces this inclusion stance. Carleton College's SAGE 2YC guidance urges departments to "embrace adjunct faculty as part of the department" through invitations and consistent communication about curricular changes (Carleton College, 2019). A hybrid community and a curated repository operationalize that guidance. They provide a stable point of entry and a stable channel for information. They also signal that adjunct participation is expected and supported.

Ground level needs become visible when communities adopt an inquiry stance. Smith describes practitioner inquiry as a way to generate "locally grounded knowledge" that can challenge assumptions made at a distance (Smith, 2007, p. 42). Locally grounded evidence can include patterns in student work, patterns in course completion, and patterns in student questions. When instructors document these patterns together, the evidence becomes harder to dismiss. The community can then propose targeted changes grounded in what students actually experience.

Mathieu Frasier describes educator communities as "counterpublics" where marginalized educators build analysis and solidarity within institutions (Mathieu Frasier, 2021, p. 89). The term helps name how peer networks can resist exploitative cultures without turning collaboration into conflict. A counterpublic is a space where collective evidence can be developed and shared. In the adjunct context, this can mean documenting how a policy plays out in evening sections or

how a support gap affects persistence. The work remains professional and student centered while still challenging the normalization of silence.

Exploitative cultures are sustained through fragmentation. Fragmentation keeps adjunct labor invisible and keeps problems individualized. Isolation also increases unpaid labor when adjuncts must chase information, interpret changing expectations, and build materials alone. Communities resist this through shared artifacts and shared planning time. Communities also resist exploitation when participation is compensated or credited. Compensation can be modest and still signal that collaboration is valued as work.

Care work is another place where isolation extracts a high cost. Ortiz and colleagues show that pedagogies of care include disciplined practices that respond to complex student lives while maintaining high expectations, and they show how community distributes emotional labor by turning individual coping into shared strategy (Ortiz et al., 2021). A community can share scripts for referral to counseling, advising, disability services, and basic needs support. A community can rehearse language that communicates empathy and standards together. A community can coordinate flexibility in process while keeping criteria for outcomes consistent.

Resilience is treated here as collective capacity rather than individual trait. Collective capacity grows when instructors have a predictable place to problem solve, share routines, and be recognized as colleagues. A quick win round at the end of a meeting keeps attention on progress and sustains momentum. The routine also reinforces the idea that small improvements accumulate when they are shared and documented. Collective resilience becomes visible as a culture of steady refinement rather than a demand for personal toughness.

Program designs that invite adjunct instructors into curriculum development and redesign, strengthening networks and creating pathways for innovations to influence policy and

assessment strengthen the impact of community work. Inclusion at this level localizes decisions around the people who teach the courses every day. It also creates a more accurate evidence base for program improvement. Adjunct instructors carry working knowledge of student constraints that should inform assignment pacing and support structures.

A community becomes consequential when its artifacts enter program decision pathways. A one page memo can summarize the priority, the change made, and the evidence observed. The memo can be shared with a curriculum committee or assessment group. This creates a bridge between practice and governance without heavy bureaucracy. Leadership then travels through artifacts rather than being confined to meetings that adjuncts cannot attend.

Assessment can function as inquiry rather than compliance when the community owns the process. A shared scoring session can focus on what student work reveals about instruction and about task clarity. Changes can be decided and tested in the next unit. The revised artifacts can be posted and annotated in the repository. This cycle keeps assessment aligned with improvement and avoids the drift into surveillance.

Design details determine whether communities sustain or fade. A predictable cadence protects participation. A narrow focus prevents initiative fatigue. Rotating roles distribute leadership and prevent burnout. A repository preserves learning and supports onboarding of new instructors. These elements create a structure that can survive staffing changes and budget shifts.

A community also supports student transfer across courses by coordinating anchor assignments. An anchor assignment that recurs across sections becomes a shared reference point for refining clarity and scaffolding. Faculty can revise the prompt across terms, build better models, and align feedback phrases. The repeated attention makes it easier to see how small changes influence student work. Students experience fewer surprises and clearer expectations.

The absence of community is also visible in the daily experience of instructors. An adjunct may grade in isolation and wonder whether their interpretation of the rubric matches the department's intention. An adjunct may respond to a student crisis alone without knowing how colleagues handle similar situations. An adjunct may teach at night without access to an office or a hallway network for quick questions. These moments are not personal shortcomings. They are structural signals that the institution has not built the collaboration it requires.

The presence of community changes those moments. Shared rubrics and shared examples make grading feel more grounded. Shared scripts make referral pathways more consistent. Shared planning routines reduce last minute improvisation. Shared repositories reduce time spent searching for current materials. Students then experience the institution as more coherent and more navigable.

No community structure replaces the need for fair employment practices. Collaboration cannot fix unstable contracts or low wages. Collaboration can still change what happens inside teaching and learning systems. It can reduce isolation, reduce redundant labor, and increase coherence across sections. It can also make adjunct expertise visible and consequential in program improvement.

The argument is ultimately visible in a familiar scene. A student asks what an assignment is asking for and what a strong response looks like. In isolation, the instructor invents clarity alone and hopes it aligns with other sections. In community, clarity has been refined through shared artifacts, shared evidence, and shared language. Students receive more consistent guidance, and instructors carry the work with less isolation.

Simple measures track whether communities are delivering on their promise. Brief monthly pulse items ask instructors about belonging and isolation, and quarterly reflections

capture implementation stories and artifacts added to the repertoire. Departments note where adjunct generated ideas influence redesign decisions. These indicators align with the mechanisms identified in research, and they provide local evidence that collaborative structures are improving practice and supporting students in open access contexts (Gehrke & Kezar, 2017, pp. 825, 827; Penuel et al., 2007, p. 925).

Communities of practice require design quality, leadership commitment, resourcing, and time. They do not substitute for fair employment practices. Even modest, well designed structures yield gains in connection, identity, and instructional coordination that matter in two-year colleges. When colleges invite adjuncts into co learning with shared content and language, resource communities to plan for implementation, and create venues to share work and lead program decisions, teaching and student success improve in ways that are visible in classrooms and in program level coherence (Smith, 2007).

The supporting tools that make these routines implementable are located in the appendices. Appendix B provides repository design elements and contribution guidance, along with sample artifacts that illustrate how prompts, rubrics, and feedback phrases can be organized by unit. Additional appendix tools include mentoring circle protocols, case clinic agendas, planning templates, and short memo formats that carry community learning into program decisions. These documents function as practical extensions of the collaborative structures described here. They offer concrete entry points for departments ready to build communities that reduce isolation and strengthen coherence.

Collaboration, peer mentoring, and community building are therefore not side projects but central levers for aligning institutional values with the lived experience of teaching and learning in two-year colleges. When adjunct instructors have predictable spaces to plan together,

hybrid communities to lean on, and repositories like Appendix B where their work is preserved and shared, reflective teaching stops being a private act of endurance and becomes a collective habit.

Students encounter more consistent expectations and clearer pathways, faculty experience less isolation and greater legitimacy, and colleges begin to realize their stated commitments to access and equity in the everyday practices of their classrooms. The structures outlined in the Appendices do not solve every labor injustice, but they do change the conditions under which adjunct faculty and their students meet each day. In that change, the two-year college moves closer to the community institution it claims to be.

Key Takeaways

Chapter 5, Movement II: Redesigning Faculty Roles and Institutional Structures

The ways faculty learn from one another, sharing strategies, troubleshooting challenges, and building informal networks of support, quietly reveal where real instructional improvement happens on a campus. When adjuncts are the ones sustaining these collaborative spaces and shaping the daily practices that hold programs together, their role as essential institutional change agents becomes impossible to overlook.

CHAPTER SIX:

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION PARADIGM

Professional development matters when it is treated as instructional infrastructure rather than as an occasional event, a compliance checkpoint, or an extra expectation added onto already compressed teaching time. In community colleges, classrooms are filled with all types of learners. This means adjunct faculty routinely teach students who are navigating work schedules, caregiving responsibilities, multilingual lives, disability access needs, uneven academic preparation, and complex relationships to school.

Adjunct facing professional development gains credibility when it strengthens skills that support all students and when it connects adjuncts to the institution, to support services, and to each other through structures that endure past a single meeting. The goal is not to create a perfect teacher. The goal is to make effective routines easier to adopt, easier to sustain, and easier to share so students experience fewer hidden rules and fewer avoidable barriers.

Teacher clarity offers a practical anchor for adjunct facing professional development because it is observable in daily teaching decisions and because it shapes student learning in visible ways. Benton and Li describe teacher clarity as “one of the teaching behaviors most strongly associated with student success” (2021, p. 1). They also argue that clarity is not only a set of teacher behaviors since “the teacher and students co create clarity through interaction” (Benton & Li, 2021, p. 1). This description matters in open access settings since students arrive with varied prior exposure to academic norms.

Clear expectations, examples, and feedback language reduce time spent decoding rules and increase time spent learning course content. Clarity also supports adjunct faculty workload

by reducing repeated logistical confusion that can consume office hours, inboxes, and class time. Benton and Li note that students in online courses may need clarification about logistics as well as content (2021, p. 2). Many community college courses use online platforms even when they meet in person, which means logistical clarity is part of access.

A case for professional development is sharpened by what is known about uneven quality in the evidence base. A federal review reported that among more than 1,300 studies identified as potentially addressing the effect of teacher professional development on student achievement, only nine met high standards for evidence (Yoon et al., 2007, p. 1). The same review reports that teachers who received substantial professional development, averaging 49 hours across the nine studies, showed effects associated with increased student achievement by about 21 percentile points (Yoon et al., 2007, p. 1). These findings do not diminish the importance of professional learning. They increase the responsibility to design it carefully and to evaluate it as an improvement process rather than as an attendance requirement.

Yoon and colleagues caution that one day workshops often make professional development “intellectually superficial, disconnected from deep issues of curriculum and learning, fragmented, and noncumulative” (Ball & Cohen, 1999, pp. 3 to 4, as cited in Yoon et al., 2007, p. 3). That critique fits what adjunct faculty often experience when professional development is delivered as a one time event without tools that translate into classroom routines.

Professional development becomes more valuable when it is framed as capacity building rather than correction. This framing is especially important for adjunct faculty since contingent roles can amplify vulnerability and exclusion. Guskey describes that teachers engage in professional development since they “want to become better teachers” and since they seek “specific, concrete, and practical ideas” that relate to classroom work (2002, p. 383). Adjunct

facing professional development respects this pragmatism by emphasizing transferable skills and by offering deliverables that can be applied immediately. The content is still scholarly and evidence informed, yet it stays close to teaching practice so instructors can see results and revise.

Evidence about professional development design points toward coherence, collective participation, duration, and follow up as recurring features in stronger studies. Yoon and colleagues identify coherence and collective participation as common elements of professional development associated with positive outcomes (2007, p. 8). Coherence means professional learning aligns with what instructors are expected to teach and assess. Collective participation means instructors learn with colleagues who share responsibility for similar teaching work, which supports shared language and shared routines. Adjunct faculty often miss these benefits when professional learning relies on informal networks or daytime meetings. A design that assumes campus presence can unintentionally exclude the instructors who teach evenings, weekends, online sections, and satellite locations.

Duration functions as repetition and reinforcement, not as a badge of attendance. Yoon and colleagues report that studies with more than 14 hours of professional development showed a positive and significant effect on student achievement, while the studies involving 5 to 14 hours showed no statistically significant effects (2007, p. 12). The same review notes that follow up sessions supported the main professional development event in all but one study (Yoon et al., 2007, p. 12). Adjunct facing professional development therefore benefits from a design that includes a short initial session, quick application in class, and scheduled follow-up where instructors bring evidence, ask questions, and refine tools.

Guskey's model of teacher change strengthens this design logic. He argues that "significant change in teachers' attitudes and beliefs occurs primarily after they gain evidence of

improvements in student learning” (Guskey, 2002, p. 383). The sequence is practice first, evidence next, belief and commitment after. This sequence fits experienced instructors who protect students from untested initiatives and fits adjunct instructors who cannot afford lengthy experimentation without support. Guskey also notes that change is gradual and can be threatening, since trying something new risks the possibility that students might “learn less well than they do under current practices” (2002, p. 387). Professional development that supports small, testable moves reduces this risk for students and instructors.

Professional development opportunities have to address connection to the institution, since connection shapes whether professional learning is applied and sustained. Burleigh and colleagues report that adjunct faculty want to be “listened to and heard” and they argue that professional development “needs to be interactive” (2021, p. 68). They describe frustration with repeated content that does not address current concerns and a preference for learning that can be applied immediately (Burleigh et al., 2021, pp. 77 to 80). These findings align with the idea that professional learning should respect faculty time and connect to real teaching decisions. A professional development structure that includes opportunities for dialogue, problem solving, and sharing reduces the sense of teaching alone and increases the likelihood that effective routines spread beyond one classroom.

These professional trainings at community colleges also need to be responsive to the student environment. Morris and Miller report that community college faculty rated linking social technology to academic success and understanding generational differences as highly important, and they also rated accommodating student disabilities and online teaching strategies as important (2023, p. 6). These priorities point toward skills that support all students rather than strategies that assume a single type of learner. Adjunct facing professional development gains

value when it strengthens inclusive course design habits, communication routines, and clarity practices that work across modalities. Morris and Miller also report varied preferences for delivery, including in person development and self-directed options (2023, p. 7). A blended approach supports participation for adjunct faculty who teach across schedules and locations and it allows return visits when an instructor needs help at a specific moment.

Deliverables are the bridge between professional development and classroom practice. Deliverables are not generic handouts. Deliverables are reusable teaching artifacts and connection tools that reduce ambiguity for students and reduce duplicated labor for adjunct faculty. Teacher clarity can be translated into deliverables such as assignment prompt templates that include purpose, task steps, and criteria, and it can be translated into rubrics that make quality criteria visible. Benton and Li note that clarity and organization work together and that student perceptions of clarity are positively correlated with perceptions of learning (2021, pp. 5 to 6). Deliverables that strengthen organization, such as consistent weekly overviews, predictable due date patterns, and streamlined navigation in online spaces, reduce student confusion and reduce instructor time spent answering repetitive questions. Benton and Li report that course design features such as concise overviews and clear lists of assignments can reduce logistical confusion (2021, p. 2).

Deliverables that support consistent feedback benefit all faculty. Benton and Li identify that meaningful feedback clarifies for students what they are doing well and where they need to improve (2021, p. 17). A shared feedback phrase bank aligned with rubric criteria helps adjunct faculty respond efficiently while maintaining rigor. Shared examples of successful work support students who are new to academic genres and reduce inequitable insider advantage. Deliverables

like these can be housed in a shared repository that adjunct faculty can access across terms and modalities.

A repository becomes more than storage when it is paired with collaboration routines. Gore and Rosser describe a pedagogy focused professional learning approach that generated “fresh insights about pedagogy and students,” enhanced collegiality, and led to ongoing collaboration (2020, p. 2). Their account emphasizes collaborative observation, analysis, and discussion supported by a shared framework and confidentiality norms that foster trust (Gore & Rosser, 2020, pp. 4 to 5). The mechanism matters for adjunct faculty since contingent roles can limit relationship building and can make it harder to develop shared teaching language. Collaboration routines that focus attention on teaching evidence rather than employment status can reduce status differences and help adjunct faculty contribute as full instructional partners.

Professional development structures that support collaboration need to fit fragmented schedules. Short mentoring circles, case discussions grounded in student work, and asynchronous artifact sharing can work together when norms are clear and when psychological safety is protected. Gore and Rosser describe how confidentiality norms ease the experience of opening classrooms to colleagues (2020, p. 4).

Psychological safety is a design condition. A professional learning space is safer when participation is separated from evaluation and employment decisions. This boundary is essential for adjunct faculty, whose roles may be more vulnerable to misinterpretation or informal surveillance. Institutional culture also shapes whether professional development feels like excellence or remediation.

Reder and colleagues describe an assumption in some contexts that faculty already “know how to teach,” which can reduce openness to professional learning (2009, p. 269). They

recommend connecting faculty development programming to stakeholder needs and building structures that sustain programming over time (Reder et al., 2009, pp. 271 to 273). They also describe how teaching culture can shift when cohorts of entering faculty share vocabulary around teaching and treat teaching as public practice that can be examined and improved (Reder et al., 2009, p. 275). Professional development that builds common language across adjunct and full time roles. Shared vocabulary reduces insider advantage and supports coherent expectations for students across sections.

Adjunct facing professional development should also connect instructors with student support services in a way that is realistic and bounded. Community college students often need more than academic instruction, and instructors are frequently the first to notice early warning signs such as persistent absence, confusion about institutional processes, or escalating stress. Adjunct faculty should not be positioned as counselors or advisors, yet they need clear referral pathways, shared scripts, and an accurate understanding of what supports exist. A professional development session can include a brief, practice oriented walkthrough of referral processes and a short set of language options instructors can use when directing students to support. These connection routines reduce inconsistency across sections and support early intervention.

A professional development model that includes adjunct faculty also needs to respect workload realities and the intermittence of teaching assignments. Yeager Okosi and colleagues state that “Online teaching requires faculty development and support to effectively meet the needs of students” (2024, p. 1). They report that results indicate faculty “may increase their confidence and instructional effectiveness after participating in an online training course” (Yeager Okosi et al., 2024, p. 1). They also describe conditions where adjunct teaching assignments may be inconsistent, which can lead to gaps in preparation and connection (Yeager

Okosi et al., 2024, pp. 2 to 3). Sustained access to resources and recurring points of connection help prevent benefits from eroding between teaching terms.

A curated list of suggested professional development opportunities is provided to support ongoing learning and choice while maintaining coherence around instructional priorities in Appendix A (Suggested Professional Development Opportunities for Adjunct Faculty). This list emphasizes learning that strengthens clarity, inclusive design, assessment transparency, and engagement across modalities. Morris and Miller note that faculty development is sometimes pulled toward compliance, while faculty seek development that helps them teach better (2023, p. 1). A curated list supports access and reduces the burden of searching for credible opportunities.

Collaboration structures and shared artifacts that make implementation easier are organized as reusable tools (Appendix B: Online Repository in the LMS). These tools support coherence and collective participation, which are emphasized as features associated with stronger professional development (Yoon et al., 2007, p. 8). The repository and routine structures translate clarity strategies such as checking understanding, using examples, and periodic review into repeatable practices (Benton & Li, 2021, p. 5). The tools also reflect faculty preferences for professional learning that is relevant and immediately usable (Burleigh et al., 2021, pp. 77 to 80).

Reflection and evidence tracking tools support small cycle improvement and make learning visible across terms (Appendix C: Distributed Leadership Guide). Yoon and colleagues emphasize the limited base of rigorous studies and the need for careful evaluation (2007, p. 8). Guskey emphasizes regular feedback on student learning progress as a condition for sustaining new practices (2002, p. 387). These tools organize a routine for documenting what was tried, what students produced, what questions surfaced, and what will be revised. The purpose is improvement, not reporting.

Measuring the success of professional development requires evidence that is meaningful to teaching rather than evidence that is merely convenient to collect. Participation counts and satisfaction surveys can indicate reach and immediate response, yet they cannot stand in for instructional change. Yoon and colleagues argue that the evidence base demands careful design and honest evaluation, especially given that only a small number of studies meet rigorous standards (2007, p. 8). A practical evaluation approach aligns with Guskey's model by focusing on what instructors implement, what students do in response, and what adjustments follow. Guskey argues that significant change in beliefs often follows evidence of improved student learning (2002, p. 383). Evaluation should foreground learning outcomes broadly constructed, including student work quality, assignment completion patterns, participation, and the kinds of questions students ask during learning.

Evidence can be gathered through teaching artifacts and student responses in ways that respect adjunct faculty time. Benton and Li emphasize that clarity is co created through interaction and that feedback loops help instructors adapt to student informational needs (2021, p. 1). A simple indicator of improved clarity is a reduction in repeated logistical questions and an increase in student accuracy when describing assignment expectations. Another indicator is the quality of student work relative to criteria after clarity routines and examples are implemented. Guskey emphasizes that successful actions are reinforcing and likely to be repeated, while new practices are often abandoned in the absence of evidence of positive effects (2002, p. 384). Evaluation that makes evidence visible supports persistence.

Collective evidence strengthens evaluation by revealing patterns across sections and by reducing the pressure on individual instructors to prove effectiveness alone. Coherence and collective participation are highlighted as features associated with stronger professional

development (Yoon et al., 2007, p. 8). When adjunct faculty share student work samples, common confusion points, and successful explanations, the institution gains insight into where students are encountering barriers and which routines are helping. Burleigh and colleagues note that adjunct faculty value being heard and that interactive professional development supports engagement (2021, p. 78). Indicators such as sustained participation, repeated use of shared artifacts, and voluntary collaboration suggest professional learning is perceived as useful rather than obligatory.

Evaluation practices should remain formative rather than punitive. Reder and colleagues emphasize the importance of framing faculty development as excellence rather than remediation and of building structures that support ongoing work (2009, p. 272). A formative approach protects psychological safety and supports honest reflection. Confidentiality norms support trust in collaborative learning spaces and reduce reluctance to share unfinished work (Gore & Rosser, 2020, p. 4). Clear boundaries between professional learning and employment decisions protect adjunct faculty and encourage risk taking that is responsible and evidence informed.

Professional development succeeds when it produces usable routines, strengthens adjunct connection to colleagues and to institutional supports, and improves clarity and navigability for students across course sections. Two-year colleges ask instructors to hold both rigor and care, often in the same moment. Shared scripts, shared routines for explaining expectations, and shared referral practices help students experience support that feels coordinated rather than accidental. Professional development becomes the place where these routines are practiced, refined, and shared so improvements accumulate over time instead of resetting each term.

This also illustrates a larger truth: students experience equity only when the systems surrounding them mirror the values the institution claims to hold. Structures that support clarity,

collaboration, and iterative learning are therefore not peripheral initiatives but manifestations of an institution's commitments. When these structures are designed with adjunct realities in mind, portable routines, compensated participation, repeatable tools, the college moves closer to aligning its labor practices with its educational mission. With that foundation established, the next chapters turn to multilingual, trauma-informed, inclusive, and differentiated pedagogies, showing how the teaching practices students encounter each day can further advance the same commitments to access, coherence, and belonging that this chapter frames as essential institutional responsibilities.

Key Takeaways

Chapter 6, Movement II: Redesigning Faculty Roles and Institutional Structures

The uneven landscape of professional development where clarity, time, and support vary wildly, reveals how much the quality of teaching depends on the structures that surround it rather than on individual effort. When adjuncts continually adapt, refine, and elevate instruction despite these inconsistent supports, their capacity to drive meaningful academic improvement becomes unmistakable, underscoring their role as essential change agents in any effort toward equity and coherence.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

MULTILINGUAL AND TRAUMA-INFORMED PEDAGOGY

In my earliest semesters as a community college adjunct, I carried a familiar teaching habit into the classroom without questioning it. During the first week of every course, I offered a low-stakes writing sample designed to help me learn who my students were as writers. The prompt was gentle and open, asking students to think about home and what home meant to them. Before asking them to write, I guided the class through a series of questions meant to help them settle into a place that felt safe and familiar. The room was quiet, focused, and engaged, and I left class feeling confident that the semester had begun well.

That confidence dissolved before I reached my car. My email filled quickly with messages that were polite, careful, and heavy. Students explained that the prompt had been difficult, not because they lacked ideas, but because home was not a place of safety for them. Some described growing up in foster care, others named past or current homelessness, and others wrote that the concept of home was tied to loss or instability rather than comfort. None of them accused me of harm, yet the harm was unmistakable. In trying to invite students into safety, I had asked many of them to return to experiences they worked hard to keep at a distance, and I had done so without realizing that my definition of safety was not shared.

The room tells a story before anyone speaks. A student chooses a seat that faces the door and keeps a backpack close as if leaving quickly might matter. Another opens a laptop and watches the syllabus as if it might shift under their eyes. In the online section, a student joins on mute, stays for ten minutes, then vanishes. In a two-year college, these choices are not always about motivation. They are often about safety and about how much energy a person can spend being visible (American Psychological Association, 2022, p. 2).

This chapter holds two commitments at the same time. It treats multilingual pedagogy as central because language difference is normal in community college classrooms. It treats trauma-informed teaching as a design stance rather than a crisis protocol because trauma and chronic stress are also common in open access settings (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014, p.12). These commitments overlap because many multilingual learners carry migration stress, discrimination, or earlier schooling harm, and many trauma affected learners are also navigating academic language and culture (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2023, p. 11), the labels often overlap. and classrooms improve when teaching is designed for that overlap.

Adjunct instructors are the hinge for this work. They teach many gateway, developmental, and online courses where students decide whether college is possible. They do this while moving between campuses, teaching at unusual hours, and planning on unpaid time. Trauma-informed and multilingual pedagogy must therefore be practical and portable, not a list of extra duties. When routines are reusable, adjunct instructors can sustain them across sections. When routines are humane, students can stay present long enough to learn (Ortíz et al., 2021, p. 33).

Trauma-informed teaching begins with safety as a learning condition. The American Psychological Association notes that the first step is to ensure classrooms feel safe for students exposed to trauma (American Psychological Association, 2022, p. 1). The same primer explains that structure and consistency in schedules and communications help students feel safe in person and online (American Psychological Association, 2022, p. 3), this guidance is often written for K to 12 contexts, yet the mechanism is not age bound. Adults also learn poorly when the body is braced for threat.

Trauma also needs a clear definition so it does not become a vague label. SAMHSA defines trauma as the result of an event, a series of events, or a set of circumstances experienced as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening, with lasting adverse effects on wellbeing (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2023, p. 10). The guide also notes that trauma can be experienced by an individual, a generation, or an entire community or culture. This matters in community colleges because students often carry personal histories and collective harms at the same time. It also matters because trauma is shaped by social conditions like racism and poverty (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2023, p. 13).

Community college classrooms are full of signals that can be misread. The APA primer notes that students exposed to trauma may show disruptions in memory and attention and may withdraw from engagement, including online (American Psychological Association, 2022, p. 2). REL Appalachia similarly notes that trauma impacts are multifaceted and highly individualized and that students may have trouble concentrating, show chronic absenteeism, or withdraw (Regional Educational Laboratory Appalachia, n.d., p. 2), those same patterns can also appear when students are processing academic English or navigating cultural restraint. A combined lens keeps instructors from collapsing these possibilities into one story.

Critical language awareness begins with the recognition that language is never just technical. Shapiro frames critical language awareness through access, asset, and agency and asks teachers to be pragmatic for today while working toward linguistic justice (Shapiro, 2025, p. 3). She also warns that awareness alone is not enough because students need learning opportunities that increase their access to power as language users (Shapiro, 2025, p. 4), trauma-informed teaching shares this insistence on access because predictability reduces cognitive load. When

language expectations stay implicit, students with insider knowledge benefit, when expectations become visible, access widens for everyone.

The overlap becomes visible in a familiar moment. A multilingual student begins an answer, pauses, and then stops mid sentence. A different student, fluent in English, also stops, because the topic has activated memories they did not plan to share. Both students benefit when participation is not limited to rapid speech in public (American Psychological Association, 2022, p. 2). Both students benefit when the course makes expectations visible so they are not guessing what counts (Shapiro, 2025, p. 8), in those moments, the category label matters less than the design choice.

A racial trauma lens strengthens this overlap. Alvarez, Sealey Ruiz, and Acosta describe racial trauma literacy as merging racial literacy and trauma-informed teaching to help educators identify and respond to racialized wounds that shape learning (Alvarez et al., 2022, p. 27), they note that racial trauma can stem from individual acts and from institutional violence (Alvarez et al., 2022, p. 27). In community colleges, multilingual learners are often racialized, and language difference can become a proxy for race or immigration status. Trauma-informed teaching that remains race neutral can still reproduce harm, especially through curriculum and correction (Alvarez et al., 2022, p. 28).

Safety is not distributed evenly across students. A classroom may feel safe for some students and dangerous for others, even when the same policies apply (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2023, p. 16). Topics like immigration, policing, and war can carry different weight depending on lived experience, and silence can be protection rather than refusal (American Psychological Association, 2022, p. 2), REL Appalachia recommends maintaining calm presence and using supportive language to promote safety and trustworthiness

(Regional Educational Laboratory Appalachia, n.d., p. 3), in multilingual classrooms, those moves also support language processing because they slow the pace and reduce threat.

The first shared move across both pedagogies is transparency. Shapiro asks teachers to explain expectations explicitly and teach norms directly rather than assuming students already know them (Shapiro, 2025, p. 8), the APA primer echoes this by emphasizing structure and consistency in schedules and communication (American Psychological Association, 2022, p. 3), in a two-year college course, transparency is the difference between a map and a maze. It shows students what the task is, how to do it, and why it matters. It also shows students what happens when life interrupts the plan.

Transparency matters for multilingual learners because decoding academic English consumes working memory. It matters for trauma affected learners because uncertainty can trigger threat responses (American Psychological Association, 2022, p. 3). SAMHSA emphasizes safety and trustworthiness and transparency as core principles of trauma-informed practice (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014, p. 11). A week-at-a-glance routine that lists tasks, purposes, and time estimates lowers cognitive load and supports safety. For adjunct instructors, templates also reduce labor across sections and make caring design more sustainable.

Transparency also means making conventions visible without treating them as moral law. Shapiro suggests teaching norms directly and framing them as rhetorical choices tied to audience and purpose (Shapiro, 2025, p. 10). In a writing classroom, this can look like collaborative sentence analysis where students ask what is conventional in a genre. It can also look like comparing two versions of a paragraph and noticing how different choices change impact. When

conventions are framed as choices, students approach them with curiosity instead of fear. This protects multilingual identity and reduces the shame that can trigger withdrawal.

The second shared move is choice. REL Appalachia recommends offering students a menu of options for demonstrating mastery and notes that students may need support learning how to choose (Regional Educational Laboratory Appalachia, n.d., p. 3). SAMHSA includes empowerment, voice, and choice as a core principle and pairs it with cultural and historical issues (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2023, p. 16), in a writing class, choice can mean an outline, a concept map, or a short audio explanation before drafting. The learning goal stays constant while the pathway shifts to fit language resources and cognitive state.

Choice also protects students from being forced into testimony. A prompt that offers an analytical pathway alongside a personal pathway lets students engage without narrating private trauma. It also allows students to write about public issues that matter to them, including racism, migration, and labor. Alvarez and colleagues note that trauma in public spaces functions differently depending on power and social positioning (Alvarez et al., 2022, p. 28), offering options that respect risk and preserve dignity. It creates agency without demanding disclosure.

The third shared move is an asset stance. Shapiro argues that an asset orientation treats students' languages, dialects, and digital writing as evidence and expertise rather than as remediation needs (Shapiro, 2025, p. 12), García and Kleyn define translanguaging as deploying a speaker's full linguistic repertoire beyond named language boundaries (García & Kleyn, 2016, p. 14). They urge teachers to leverage all features of the repertoire while teaching when and why to use particular features (García & Kleyn, 2016, p. 15). This stance is also trauma-informed

because it reduces shame and protects identity. When students are not treated as broken, they take academic risks.

Translanguaging functions as both access and care. García and Kleyn emphasize assessment that lets students demonstrate learning through their entire repertoire (García & Kleyn, 2016, p. 23). In community college classrooms, that can mean bilingual annotation, multilingual glossaries, and drafts that begin in the language that best supports thinking. The goal is not to avoid academic English, because students still need access to it. The goal is to use the full repertoire to reach academic English with less shame and more clarity. This benefits multilingual learners and also benefits trauma affected learners whose working memory is strained (American Psychological Association, 2022, p. 2).

An asset stance changes what correction feels like. Many multilingual learners have experienced schooling as a place where language difference is treated as error. Many trauma affected learners have experienced institutions as places that punish mistakes, which can embed cycles of avoidance and punishment (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014, p. 5), Shapiro suggests framing grammar feedback as choices that support reader understanding (Shapiro, 2025, p. 15). The APA primer also advises teachers to validate experiences and not treat trauma responses as discipline problems (American Psychological Association, 2022, p. 3), when instructors lead with meaning and offer options second, students can revise without shame.

Agency is the hinge that holds access and assets together. Shapiro defines an agency centered curriculum as one that recognizes multilingual resources while promoting growth and preparing students to make informed language choices with confidence (Shapiro, 2025, p. 6). Trauma-informed frameworks also emphasize empowerment because control supports recovery and engagement (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014, p. 11),

agency can be scaffolded through writer's memos, revision plans, and check ins that make decision making visible, these moves strengthen learning for all students, not only multilingual students.

Negotiation supports agency because it treats language as collaborative work. Canagarajah argues that translanguaging is a social accomplishment achieved through interaction and local alignment of resources (Canagarajah, 2011, p. 4). SAMHSA emphasizes collaboration and mutuality as core principles of a trauma-informed approach (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2023, p. 16), in practice, negotiated literacy appears when instructors respond as readers rather than judges. It appears when peers co-construct meaning through discussion and annotation. Collaboration helps multilingual learners build audience awareness, and it helps trauma-affected learners feel less alone.

Avoiding retraumatization is another place where the two pedagogies converge. REL Appalachia recommends minimizing potential triggers and keeping schedules and rules consistent to avoid surprises (Regional Educational Laboratory Appalachia, n.d., p. 3), in higher education, retraumatization often happens through public shaming rather than loud noises. It happens when a student is corrected in front of peers for how they speak, or when personal writing is suddenly graded for surface correctness. It also happens when students must disclose to earn flexibility. Trauma-informed multilingual pedagogy replaces surprise with clarity and offers alternatives that preserve rigor.

Some students experience trauma through schooling itself. Rodriguez describes schooling as changing him and separating him from the life he enjoyed before becoming a student (Rodriguez, 1982, p. 2). He also describes education as a nurturing never natural to the person one was before entering a classroom (Rodriguez, 1982, p. 14), for multilingual students, that

separation can intensify when home language is treated as wrong and academic English becomes a gate. Trauma-informed multilingual pedagogy teaches conventions as access while protecting identity. It creates a classroom where students can gain academic power without being asked to erase themselves.

Program structures can either reduce harm or reproduce it. ESL sequences can create many exit points and progression can stall when pathways are long and confusing. Placement based on a single instrument can misassign students and delay transfer level work (Scott Clayton et al., 2014, p. 375), for students with trauma histories, being told they do not belong can echo earlier rejection. For multilingual learners, misplacement can feel like institutional disbelief. Trauma-informed policy includes transparent placement messaging and accelerated pathways that connect directly to transfer level work.

Assessment inside the classroom can also amplify or reduce threat. Inoue's labor based grading contracts decouple grades from judgments of quality and attach grades to negotiated labor within a compassionate assessment ecology (Inoue, 2022, p. 328), this reduces the fear that one crisis week will permanently derail a student's standing. It also reduces the tendency to police language as a proxy for intelligence. Inoue argues that socially just assessment ecologies can reduce harm by shifting attention from policing language to negotiating labor and effects (Inoue, 2022, p. 301). This aligns with trauma-informed principles of safety, collaboration, and empowerment (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014, p. 11).

The overlap between multilingual and trauma-informed pedagogy is clearest in feedback moments. A student submits a draft with strong ideas but nonstandard phrasing. Another submits a draft with correct grammar but thin thinking because they rushed under stress. Both students need a response that begins with meaning and builds confidence. The APA primer advises

teachers to empathize and validate experiences and to avoid treating trauma responses as discipline problems (American Psychological Association, 2022, p. 3), Shapiro similarly suggests framing grammar comments as choices that support reader understanding (Shapiro, 2025, p.15).

Relational routines can support both groups without turning instructors into therapists. A short weekly check in can ask what is going well and what support is needed. Students can answer in any language and share as much or as little as they choose. Multilingual learners can communicate needs without searching for perfect English, trauma affected learners can signal capacity without explaining the cause. REL Appalachia recommends checking in regularly and letting students know they can come for support (Regional Educational Laboratory Appalachia, n.d., p. 3).

A trauma-informed multilingual lens also changes what counts as participation. The APA primer notes that students exposed to trauma may withdraw from video or chat engagement online and may have difficulty focusing (American Psychological Association, 2022, p. 2), multilingual learners may also withdraw when participation requires rapid speech in public. Participation options that include writing first, small group rehearsal, anonymous question tools, and optional audio responses support both groups. Access widens because performance is not the only path. Participation becomes a set of pathways rather than a single gate.

Labels overlap. and that overlap should shape how adjuncts interpret student behavior. A student may be identified as multilingual, but the barrier may be housing insecurity or racial trauma. Another may be identified as trauma affected, but their silence may be language processing or fear of accent stigma. Trauma-informed teaching keeps instructors from assuming a single cause. Multilingual pedagogy keeps instructors from treating language difference as a

deficit. Together, they reduce punitive responses and increase accurate support (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2023, p. 16).

Adjunct faculty development should treat these pedagogies as one coherent ecology. Workshops can model predictable weekly rhythms, transparent prompts, and choice menus that protect agency. They can model translanguaging routines such as bilingual annotation and multilingual resources that support comprehension and expression (García & Kleyn, 2016, p. 23), they can rehearse feedback language that begins with meaning and frames conventions as rhetorical choices (Shapiro, 2025, p. 14). They can introduce trauma-informed principles as universal precautions rather than as a crisis checklist.

Institutional alignment matters because trauma-informed teaching is not only an individual practice. SAMHSA's practical guide emphasizes that a trauma-informed approach requires organizational change across domains such as training, workforce development, policy, and evaluation (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2023, pp. 3 to 4). The guide also emphasizes avoiding practices that retraumatize and beginning with cultural humility (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2023, pp. 9 and 18), for community colleges, this means paid adjunct training, clear referral pathways, and consistent communication about student supports. It also means compensating care work rather than expecting invisible labor, adjunct instructors cannot build trauma-informed cultures alone.

This chapter prepares the ground for what follows. Inclusive and differentiated instruction through UDL extends trauma-informed and multilingual principles into course design that anticipates variability. Metacognition, scaffolding, and study skills make learning processes visible so students can plan and recover when stress is high. These are not separate solutions stacked on top of trauma-informed teaching. They are the same commitments expressed through

design. When students have multiple ways to engage, represent understanding, and show learning, they are less likely to shut down.

The claim is simple and demanding. Multilingual pedagogy and trauma-informed teaching converge on the same learning conditions, safety, predictability, choice, and dignity (Shapiro, 2025, p. 3). They converge because language and trauma are shaped by power and institutional histories (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2023, p. 10), they converge because many students carry both language transition and stress, and labels rarely tell the full story. Adjunct instructors can enact this convergence through routines that make expectations visible, honor repertoires, and scaffold agency. When institutions compensate and support that work, classrooms become places where students can stay long enough to grow.

What ultimately matters is not whether a student fits a category, but whether the classroom fits the student who arrives that day. When instruction is predictable, humane, and responsive to language, students do not have to choose between protecting themselves and participating. Multilingual learners gain space to think, draft, and revise without being reduced to error, and students shaped by trauma gain space to engage without being exposed. For adjunct instructors, these same structures replace constant improvisation with intentional design and restore a sense of professional agency. A pedagogy that anticipates overlap rather than exception honors the realities of community college classrooms and makes learning possible without demanding resilience as proof of worth.

Taken together, the commitments outlined in this chapter show how multilingual and trauma-informed pedagogy are not separate initiatives but interconnected design stances that make community college classrooms more predictable, humane, and intellectually demanding. When instructors make expectations visible, honor linguistic repertoires, and build flexible

pathways into rigorous work, students no longer have to choose between self-protection and participation. These same routines also give adjunct faculty portable, sustainable structures they can carry across sections and campuses, reducing improvisation and strengthening coherence for the students who rely on them most.

Key Takeaways

Chapter 7, Movement III: Designing for Students: Inclusive, Multilingual, Responsive Pedagogy
MOVEMENT

In classrooms where students carry linguistic diversity, trauma histories, and the weight of unpredictable lives, the smallest choices in structure, language, and care determine whether learning feels possible. Since adjuncts are so often the ones holding these complex spaces with skill and empathy, acknowledging them as indispensable change agents is central to any effort to build more humane, responsive, and equitable colleges.

CHAPTER EIGHT:

INCLUSIVE AND DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Universal Design for Learning begins from a simple recognition. Students arrive in college classrooms with different ways of paying attention, processing information, and demonstrating understanding. These differences are not occasional and they are not exceptional. They appear across age, language background, educational history, disability status, work schedule, and prior experience. When a course is designed for a narrow version of the learner, access becomes uneven. When a course is designed for variability, participation becomes possible without explanation or request.

A student opens the learning management system on a phone between work and childcare, and the screen fills with files that look the same. Another student watches a video but cannot follow the audio clearly, so the content slips away before the assignment even begins. Another reads the prompt twice, then again, because the task is clear to the instructor but not yet clear to them. None of these students are refusing to learn. They are navigating design. Universal Design for Learning matters because it treats these moments as predictable and worth planning for.

Novak and Rodriguez describe Universal Design for Learning as a framework that helps educators maximize desirable challenges while minimizing unnecessary difficulties (Novak & Rodriguez, 2023, p. 1), they argue that equal opportunity requires being purposeful, proactive, and flexible (Novak & Rodriguez, 2023, p. 1). In practice, that purpose shows up as clear goals, predictable routines, and materials that can be accessed in more than one way. The flexibility shows up as choices in how students engage, how they learn information, and how they demonstrate understanding (Novak & Rodriguez, 2023, p. 1).

Inclusive teaching is imperative in two-year colleges and adjunct professional development in this area is not an add-on, but a necessity. These institutions and adjunct faculty serve students who are often underprepared, overcommitted, and underestimated. Many gateway courses are taught by adjunct instructors who work across campuses and teach in compressed schedules. In that context, inclusive teaching cannot depend on improvisation or on exceptional labor. It has to be built into the course so that students can find their way even when life interrupts.

Differentiation belongs in the same conversation, but it works at a different scale. Universal design builds options into the environment before the course begins. Differentiation responds to evidence during the course by adjusting supports, pacing, and pathways. Novak and Rodriguez emphasize that needs shift and that intrapersonal variability is part of learning across time and context (Novak & Rodriguez, 2023, p. 3), differentiation is what happens when a student's capacity changes midweek or midsemester. When Universal Design for Learning provides the structure, differentiation becomes guidance rather than exception.

In week one, a writing sample prompt asks students to describe home, and some students freeze because home is not a safe word. In a different course, a lab activity assumes students already know how to read a graph, and several students stare at the axes without knowing where to begin. In an online section, a student tries to submit a file and discovers the only accepted format requires software they do not have. These are not rare moments. They are predictable moments in open access settings. Universal Design for Learning begins by designing for these moments so the first barrier does not become the last.

The difference between retrofitting and designing becomes clear when accommodations arrive. A student receives an accommodation letter, and the instructor begins a private set of

adjustments. Another student does not request accommodations, but still struggles with the same barrier, and nothing changes. Over time, access becomes a matter of confidence, documentation, and willingness to be seen. Reardon, Bromley, and Unruh note that disability support services offices are often overburdened with providing and monitoring accommodations, which creates pressure for a new model of access (Reardon et al., 2021, p. 209), in community colleges, where needs are diverse and resources are limited, that burden is felt everywhere.

Orndorf and colleagues note that disability is often underreported for reasons including fear of stigma (Orndorf et al., 2022, p. 3), that means the classroom may contain hidden barriers that never become formal requests. When support is only available through disclosure, access becomes a private negotiation. Universal design changes the social conditions by making supports part of the normal course infrastructure. A student can turn on captions without explaining why, a student can use guided notes without asking permission. A student can choose a format that fits their strengths without making a case for exception.

Rose and colleagues clarify what Universal Design for Learning adds to universal design. They explain that assistive technologies are often individualized and describe them as “unique, personal, customized, and dedicated” (Rose et al., 2006, p. 136). They contrast this with universal design, which anticipates diversity and is engineered for flexibility and options in the environment (Rose et al., 2006, p. 136), a student may still need individualized support, but the course can be designed so fewer supports require private negotiation. Universal Design for Learning begins by changing the environment rather than trying to change the student.

This distinction also protects academic standards. When learning supports are framed as exceptions, they can be mistaken for lowered expectations. When supports are built into the environment, the course can hold high expectations while removing barriers that are unrelated to

the goal. Rose and colleagues note that UDL requires not only accessible information but also “an accessible pedagogy” (Rose et al., 2006, p. 136), Womack reinforces that accessibility is the precondition to all learning (Womack, 2017, p. 494). The question becomes what the course is asking students to do, and which barriers are accidental.

Womack writes, “Accommodation is the most basic act and art of teaching” (Womack, 2017, p. 494). In the classroom, accommodation can look like slowing the pace when comprehension drops. It can look like providing a model when students do not know what a product should resemble. It can look like allowing a student to rehearse an answer in writing before speaking. Teaching already changes conditions so students can learn. Universal design simply makes those changes intentional and available to all.

Novak and Rodriguez frame UDL as culturally responsive and trauma-informed for all students (Novak & Rodriguez, 2023, p. 1), that claim becomes visible when a course lowers threat through predictability. A student who has been punished for asking questions can see the weekly routine and stop guessing. A multilingual student can rely on captions, glossaries, and visuals without being singled out. A student balancing work and caregiving can plan because the due date pattern is consistent. When students can predict the course, they can spend energy on learning.

Novak and Rodriguez also warn against confusing variability with learning styles. They cite Meyer and colleagues to emphasize that similarity across brains is an illusion to neuroscientists (Meyer et al., 2014, as cited in Novak & Rodriguez, 2023, p. 2), they reject the learning styles myth and insist that multiple pathways are justified by variability rather than by style matching (Novak & Rodriguez, 2023, pp. 2 to 3), this matters because labels like visual learner can turn into narrow teaching. Variability invites options, and it also invites students to

choose based on what they need that day. Novak and Rodriguez state that needs are always changing (Novak & Rodriguez, 2023, p. 3).

Orndorf and colleagues describe a jagged profile of strengths and needs and argue that UDL informed environments expect and embrace learner variability (Orndorf et al., 2022, p. 1), they emphasize preserving productive challenges while removing unnecessary barriers (Orndorf et al., 2022, p. 3), a productive challenge might be analyzing an argument or designing an experiment. An unnecessary barrier might be decoding a dense prompt with unfamiliar idioms or trying to watch a video without captions. UDL helps instructors preserve challenges by clearing the path to it. Students still do hard work, but they are not blocked by avoidable design.

Representation is often where UDL becomes visible first because it lives in the materials students touch. A student looks for the weekly schedule and cannot find it, so they assume they missed something. Another student downloads a file that will not open on a phone, so they postpone the work until they have access to a computer. Another sees instructions embedded in a long paragraph, so they miss the one sentence that contains the due date, these are not academic failures, they are design failures. Rose and colleagues note that there is no common optimal means of representing information, and they emphasize that multiple means of representation are key (Rose et al., 2006, p. 136).

Rose and colleagues describe providing alternative representations of lectures through sign language interpreters and video recordings that allow replay and review (Rose et al., 2006, pp. 140). They also describe collecting student notes and posting them, which created multiple representations of the same content and made variability visible (Rose et al., 2006, pp. 141). In a community college classroom, this can look like a short outline posted before class, a brief recap

after class, and an accessible set of notes that students can use to reenter after absence. The point is not to make the work easier, the point is to make access reliable.

A lecture outline is a small object, but it changes the room. Students stop scanning for what matters because the structure is visible. Students who translate internally have a place to anchor attention. Students who miss the first ten minutes can still orient. Reardon and colleagues report that students noticed and valued routines like starting with an outline and summarizing key points after UDL focused training (Reardon et al., 2021, p. 216), those routines support students without requiring disclosure, they also support instructors because they reduce repeated clarification questions.

UDHE Promising Practices offers a faculty development example that shows representation as a redesign practice. The syllabus redesign table includes calendars, concept maps, online resources, and digital versions of materials (Langley Turnbaugh et al., 2013, as cited in Burgstahler, 2013, p. 15). Faculty describe using short videos and hands on exercises to illustrate key concepts and build a learning community (Langley Turnbaugh et al., 2013, as cited in Burgstahler, 2013, p. 13), these moves reduce confusion and lower entry barriers. They also travel across sections, which matters for adjunct instructors teaching multiple courses.

Technology can amplify representation, but it can also hide exclusion, a scanned PDF without readable text blocks screen readers and prevents search. A video without captions blocks deaf and hard of hearing students and also limits multilingual learners and students in noisy environments. A course shell filled with unlabeled links makes navigation feel like guessing. Womack notes that digital environments can still exclude when texts are not flexible enough for users to modify them (Womack, 2017, p, 511). Rose and colleagues note that lectures and

textbooks can be ineffective for some students and for all students in some content areas (Rose et al., 2006, p. 140).

Rao's chapter in UDHE shows how representation intersects with nontraditional learners in online environments. Rao identifies challenges like ambiguity about expectations and excessive reliance on text, then maps strategies like consistent organization and multimodal information (Rao, as cited in Burgstahler, 2013, pp. 19 to 21). Students reported that audio and video files helped them comprehend content and made the course feel manageable (Rao, as cited in Burgstahler, 2013, p. 21), students also reported that guided notes helped them focus on key concepts (Rao, as cited in Burgstahler, 2013, p. 21), these supports reduce cognitive load so students can allocate effort to thinking.

Representation also includes language and clarity, a prompt filled with jargon can be a barrier even for students who are fluent in English. A student may know what you mean, but not the word you used, a multilingual student may know the concept but not the idiom. When instructors clarify vocabulary and provide examples, students spend less effort decoding and more effort reasoning. This is consistent with UDL's goal of reducing unnecessary difficulty (Novak & Rodriguez, 2023, p. 1). It is also consistent with Rose and colleagues' insistence that teaching methods for highlighting critical features must be accessible (Rose et al., 2006, p. 136).

Action and expression become visible when students are asked to show what they know. A student understands a concept in discussion but freezes when asked to produce a written response in a timed format. Another student can write clearly but struggles to speak in front of a group, especially in a second language. Another student can explain ideas fluently in speech but not yet in academic writing. Rose and colleagues state there is no one means of expression that

will be optimal for all students (Rose et al., 2006, p. 137), they also emphasize that assessment must provide multiple means for expression (Rose et al., 2006, p. 148).

Rose and colleagues describe assessments that asked students to build web based projects with multiple media rather than only traditional papers (Rose et al., 2006, pp. 148 to 149), the design expanded the palette of expression without removing intellectual demand. Students could show relationships, patterns, and arguments through text, images, sound, and video. In community colleges, a similar move is to allow a recorded explanation alongside a written paragraph when the goal is conceptual mastery. The student still must demonstrate understanding. The mode becomes a pathway rather than a gate.

Orndorf and colleagues provide a simple example through exam timing. They argue that extending time changes the focus to content mastery rather than how quickly students answer questions (Orndorf et al., 2022, p. 5), a student who needs more time may be translating, processing, or managing anxiety. When speed is not the learning goal, speed should not be the barrier. This illustrates preserving productive challenge while removing unnecessary barriers (Orndorf et al., 2022, p. 3), it also echoes Womack's warning against treating rigor as exclusion (Womack, 2017, p. 497).

Poore Pariseau's community college example shows how flexible products can be held to stable standards. Students were invited to demonstrate learning through options such as an essay, poster, video, audio recording, or a phone call (Poore Pariseau, as cited in Burgstahler, 2013, p. 39). The work was graded with a rubric, and submissions were reviewed using one set of standards even when formats differed (Poore Pariseau, as cited in Burgstahler, 2013, p. 40), the assessment measured what students learned rather than how well they performed one narrow genre. This is a practical way to make equity visible.

Students do not always trust flexible assessments at first. Some worry that creative options will be judged more harshly than traditional work, and others prefer familiar formats because they know what to expect. Poore Pariseau's example shows that early notice, time to plan, and a clear rubric help students understand what will be evaluated and why (Poore Pariseau, as cited in Burgstahler, 2013, p. 40). Differentiation strengthens this process by guiding students toward a format that fits their strengths while still meeting shared expectations. In this way, choice becomes part of instruction rather than a free for all.

Engagement is often misunderstood as a set of motivational tricks when it is actually one of the core principles of Universal Design for Learning. Rose and colleagues argue that learners differ in what sustains their interest and how they build self regulation across time (Rose et al., 2006, p. 137). Novak and Rodriguez connect this principle to equity by explaining that proactive and flexible course design creates more equal opportunities to engage (Novak and Rodriguez, 2023, p. 1). In community colleges, engagement often hinges on whether students see the relevance of their work and whether classroom structures help them feel safe enough to take risks. Predictable routines lower threat, and relevance encourages commitment.

Rao's research on online learning highlights that support for engagement often function as support for access. Students valued consistent module design, timely instructor feedback, and opportunities to connect with peers (Rao, as cited in Burgstahler, 2013, p. 21). They described multimodal content as something that made coursework manageable rather than easier, which matters in settings where many learners balance adult responsibilities (Rao, as cited in Burgstahler, 2013, p. 21). When a course feels navigable, students tend to persist. When it feels confusing, they often disappear.

Choice is a bridge between UDL and differentiation. UDL builds options into the design so students can select pathways that work for them. Differentiation then helps students learn how to choose, especially when choosing itself is new. Novak and Rodriguez remind us that needs shift across contexts and weeks (Novak and Rodriguez, 2023, p. 3). A student may rely on captions during a week of exhaustion and prefer audio the following week. Another may choose an oral response on one assignment and a written one on the next. The course can support both states without requiring disclosure or exception.

Rose and colleagues describe optional discussion formats, both face to face and online, so students can select the participation mode that fits their readiness (Rose et al., 2006, p. 146). They also describe review sessions and advanced sessions to accommodate different levels of preparation (Rose et al., 2006, p. 146). These choices build differentiation into the UDL structure rather than layering it on top. The same student may move between levels across the semester, which reflects the normal variability of learning, not inconsistency. Flexibility does not create fragmentation. It creates conditions for growth.

Differentiation also supports students who begin the course at different levels of background knowledge. Rose and colleagues describe optional readings that give students different entry points into the material (Rose et al., 2006, p. 137). A short explainer can help someone returning to school after many years, while a more advanced text can keep a stronger student engaged. The learning goals stay the same. The pathways shift.

UDL should never become a checklist. Orndorf and colleagues caution against treating it as a series of boxes to fill (Orndorf et al., 2022, p. 5). Womack emphasizes that universal design is a process because no single tool will work for every student in every moment (Womack, 2017, p. 500). In community colleges, this is hopeful. It means instructors can begin with one

meaningful change. A weekly overview is one change. A captioned video is one change. A flexible assessment option is one change. Each addition raises the baseline for the next term.

Faculty development and institutional support shape whether these changes take root. Reardon and colleagues describe a gap between faculty members' positive attitudes toward inclusive teaching and the actions they are able to take (Reardon et al., 2021, p. 216). That gap is often structural. Adjunct instructors may not have paid time to redesign materials or access to instructional design consultation. When colleges treat UDL as optional, implementation varies widely. When institutions provide templates, coaching, and compensated redesign time, consistency increases and inclusive design becomes sustainable.

Reardon and colleagues note that even brief training can improve faculty perceptions and students' experiences of inclusion (Reardon et al., 2021, p. 217). Students reported seeing clearer structure, more accessible formats, and improved organization after faculty participated in UDL focused sessions (Reardon et al., 2021, p. 216). These are concrete routines rather than abstract ideals. They do not require perfection. They require support.

UDHE's Promising Practices illustrate how faculty learning becomes more meaningful when it is collaborative and spread over time. Faculty in the USM program began with limited familiarity with UDL and gradually redesigned syllabi and course materials through guided exploration and peer feedback (Langley Turnbaugh et al., 2013, as cited in Burgstahler, 2013, p. 13). Some reported increased student engagement after adopting multiple formats and interactive media (Langley Turnbaugh et al., 2013, as cited in Burgstahler, 2013, p. 16). This model treats redesign as ongoing work rather than a one time requirement, and it reduces the isolation that many faculty experience.

Reardon and colleagues propose the Inclusive Teaching Strategies Inventory as a tool for identifying training needs and guiding faculty development (Reardon et al., 2021, p. 218). They also recommend a consultant model in which disability services support faculty by focusing on accessible instructional design rather than only on individual accommodations (Reardon et al., 2021, p. 218). In a two-year college, this can mean a shared course shell that already includes captioning, accessible documents, and coherent navigation. It can also mean short coaching sessions or templates that reduce ambiguity and crisis for students and instructors.

Inclusive teaching extends beyond the classroom. UDHE emphasizes that student services, institutional publications, and staff training are all part of the accessibility ecosystem (Burgstahler and Moore, as cited in Burgstahler, 2013, p. 28). When these entry points are clear, students can act early, ask questions, and find help before small problems escalate. When these pathways are hidden or confusing, students often withdraw silently, and instructors are left to guess what happened.

The course syllabus is one place where design, policy, and trust meet. Womack argues that syllabi are not neutral documents and that their tone shapes how students interpret a course and the person teaching it (Womack, 2017, p. 503). She also notes that when viewed through a disability lens, a syllabus becomes a statement about how far inclusion extends (Womack, 2017, p. 501). Punitive language can push students away before they begin, especially students who have experienced school as a site of punishment. Inclusive language signals shared responsibility and support. It does not eliminate expectations, but it changes how students approach them.

Womack also emphasizes the need to balance student needs with instructor capacity, particularly in large or high load teaching environments (Womack, 2017, p. 518). UDL supports this balance. A flexible late window reduces email negotiations. A consistent reentry procedure

reduces confusion. A rubric used across formats reduces grading strain. These routines protect instructor time while widening access.

Deadline policy shows how UDL and differentiation work together. Orndorf and colleagues demonstrate that extended time shifts assessment back to content mastery (Orndorf et al., 2022, p. 5). Womack argues that reducing unnecessary barriers while maintaining rigor is a central part of fair teaching (Womack, 2017, p. 497). Flexible timing helps students weather difficult weeks without derailing the entire term. Differentiation can then help students plan their next steps. The course becomes rigorous and humane.

Representation also matters in daily interactions. A student who arrives late because of a transit delay can reenter more easily when key directions appear in a posted outline. A student who writes strong ideas but struggles with structure can revise with clearer models. Womack argues that accessibility is the precondition for all learning (Womack, 2017, p. 494). When expectations are visible, students can improve their work. When expectations are opaque, feedback feels like judgment.

Rose and colleagues describe shared notes as a tool for collective representation (Rose et al., 2006, p. 142). In a writing class, this could take the form of a shared glossary developed across the semester. Students define terms in plain language, offer example sentences, and sometimes translate definitions into another language for their own study. The instructor does not need to speak every language for this to benefit the whole class. It increases clarity and makes meaning visible.

The same principle applies to visual design. Dense blocks of text can signal that the course is meant for expert readers. Clear headings, spacing, and navigable structure signal that

the course was built for learners. This is not cosmetic. It is access and it reduces repeated questions.

Some students avoid seeking help because asking has carried risk in the past. Orndorf and colleagues note that stigma contributes to underreporting of disability (Orndorf et al., 2022, p. 3). Students learning in an additional language may fear being judged for accent or phrasing. Students who have experienced trauma may fear public mistakes. UDL reduces the need for disclosure by making support normal and available to all (Novak and Rodriguez, 2023, p. 1).

Course websites also matter. Rose and colleagues describe their course website as the backbone that holds the syllabus, assignments, lecture videos, and notes in predictable locations (Rose et al., 2006, p. 148). In two-year colleges, a consistent weekly module design serves the same purpose. Students stop hunting for information when patterns repeat. Predictability becomes an access feature and a trauma-informed feature because it limits surprise.

Rao notes that isolation is a common challenge in online courses, especially for nontraditional learners (Rao, as cited in Burgstahler, 2013, p. 20). A student who opens a course and sees only due dates may interpret the space as punitive. A student who sees a short welcome video, a clear structure, and a weekly check in may interpret the course as a community. The difference is design. Engagement becomes structural.

Assessment shapes belonging. A timed essay can judge speed and fluency instead of conceptual understanding. Rose and colleagues argue for multiple means of expression (Rose et al., 2006, p. 148). Orndorf and colleagues show that extended time can remove logistical barriers (Orndorf et al. 2022, p. 5). Poore Pariseau shows that flexible products can be graded fairly with a stable rubric (Poore Pariseau, as cited in Burgstahler, 2013, p. 41). These examples demonstrate that fairness is a design choice rather than an accommodation.

Many faculty want to teach inclusively but are unsure which changes matter most. Reardon and colleagues identify discrepancies between supportive attitudes and actual implementation (Reardon et al., 2021, p. 216). Time, training, and compensation are often the missing supports. UDHE's example shows that structured opportunities for redesign lead to meaningful shifts in practice (Langley Turnbaugh et al., 2013, as cited in Burgstahler, 2013, p. 16). For adjunct instructors, compensation is the condition that makes this work feasible.

Reardon and colleagues recommend that disability services offices provide training and consultation rather than relying solely on individual accommodations (Reardon et al., 2021, p. 218). In two-year colleges, this could mean course shells with accessible templates, captioned videos, and clear navigation already in place. It could also mean short coaching sessions focused on flexible routines. These structures reduce crises for students and protect instructor capacity.

Universal Design for Learning supports all learners because it begins with the premise that variability is normal. It provides multiple means of representation, action and expression, and engagement as part of the course environment rather than as exceptions (Rose et al., 2006, p. 136). This stance supports students who are new to academic culture, students who are learning in an additional language, students balancing adult responsibilities, and students with disabilities. It also supports those who never disclose why they struggle.

Differentiation complements this work by responding to needs that cannot be predicted in advance. Students change across weeks and contexts. Novak and Rodriguez note that intrapersonal variability is a reality of learning (Novak and Rodriguez, 2023, p. 3). Differentiation offers targeted support, flexible grouping, and feedback that helps students choose strategies and reenter after disruption. When UDL provides the structure, differentiation becomes coaching within a fair system.

Mission must be matched by design and by labor conditions. Reardon and colleagues show that goodwill cannot close gaps in accessibility or inclusive practice (Reardon et al., 2021, pp. 209, 216). UDHE provides examples of sustained training that produced real changes in classrooms (Langley Turnbaugh et al., 2013, as cited in Burgstahler, 2013, p. 14). Womack cautions that accessibility work can become inaccessible for instructors when institutions do not support it (Womack, 2017, p. 521). When colleges invest in templates, coaching, and paid redesign time, inclusive teaching becomes repeatable across sections. Repeatability is equity.

Universal design is not a finish line. It is a process of noticing barriers, reducing them, and learning from what students show. Womack’s reminder that universal design is an ongoing practice keeps the work honest (Womack, 2017, p. 500). Orndorf and colleagues caution against checklist thinking because it obscures the iterative nature of the work (Orndorf et al., 2022, p. 5). In community colleges, this is encouraging because it means small changes matter and the work can be shared. When courses anticipate variability, students can stay long enough to learn, and instructors can teach without constant crisis. When courses are built to meet the students who actually walk through the door, learning becomes something they can reach rather than something they must chase.

Key Takeaways

Chapter 8, Movement III: Designing for Students: Inclusive, Multilingual, Responsive Pedagogy MOVEMENT

When students arrive with wildly different levels of preparation, language backgrounds, and ways of making sense of the world, the flexibility and clarity built into a course often determine whether learning feels reachable or out of grasp. Because adjuncts are the ones most often designing and adjusting these courses in real time, their expertise in crafting inclusive and adaptable learning environments positions them as indispensable change agents in advancing equity across the college.

CHAPTER NINE:

SCAFFOLDING, STUDY SKILLS, METACOGNITION, AND HIGHER-ORDER THINKING SKILLS

Community college classrooms are places where the process becomes visible. Students arrive with real intelligence and real responsibility in their lives, yet many have never been shown how academic learning is built. They have been told to study, but rarely taught what studying means in a way that produces durable learning. They have been told to write papers, but rarely shown the sequence of decisions that turns an idea into an argument. They have been told to read, but rarely taught how to move from decoding to analysis when a text is dense.

When the demands of a course remain hidden, students interpret confusion as a personal problem, and the course becomes a gate rather than a pathway. The daily work of teaching can change that outcome when instructors treat reading as a process, writing as a process, learning as a process, and teaching as a process. In two-year colleges the most urgent barrier is often not content knowledge. The urgent barrier is uncertainty about how to approach the work.

Metacognition offers a language for making the process of learning teachable, and it offers a set of moves instructors can embed in ordinary class routines. Stanton, Sebesta, and Dunlosky define metacognition with a clarity that fits the classroom, stating, “Metacognition is awareness and control of thinking for learning” (Stanton et al., 2021, p. 1). Metacognition in their account includes knowledge about strategies and regulation of strategy use. Students learn what strategies exist, how they work, and when and why they should be used, and they practice regulation through planning, monitoring, and evaluating. This definition frames learning as something students can do on purpose rather than something that happens to them. It also gives

faculty an instructional target that is concrete. If awareness and control matter, then instruction should make awareness visible and give students repeated opportunities to practice control.

The difference between a student who persists and a student who withdraws is often not capacity. It is often the moment when a student realizes they do not know what to do next. That moment is quiet. It happens in the blank space between an assignment prompt and a first sentence. It happens when a student opens a textbook and realizes they cannot tell what is important. It happens when a student looks at a practice problem and cannot decide which method fits.

In two-year colleges, these moments accumulate quickly because students often carry tight schedules and do not have spare hours to wander through confusion. When we build process into instruction, we give students a way to respond to these moments without panic. We give them a plan, a monitoring routine, and an evaluation habit.

Planning is the first hinge in metacognitive regulation. It is also the place where many students have the least practice. Planning is not simply writing a due date on a phone. Planning is deciding what the goal is, identifying what must be learned to reach it, choosing strategies that fit the task, and estimating time in a way that matches reality.

Students who have survived school by completing tasks at the last minute often do not plan because they do not believe planning is part of the work. Planning can also feel like a luxury when students are balancing jobs and caregiving. Yet planning is the only way to make academic work feasible when time is scarce. And, planning must be taught.

An and Cao's study of metacognitive scaffolding in an online environment makes this visible with empirical specificity. They state, "Students do not always engage in planning activities without appropriate scaffolding" (An & Cao, 2014, p. 562). Their intervention required

students to complete planning sheets that identified learning issues and built timelines, and instructor feedback helped students revise ineffective plans and correct misunderstandings early.

Students described the timeline as the most useful part of the planning sheet, and the authors observed that the tool reduced overwhelm and supported more effective use of time. They summarize this process result by noting, “The planning sheet served as a roadmap during the students’ design problem solving” (An & Cao, 2014, p. 561). The phrase roadmap matters because it is exactly what students often lack. They do not need more willpower. They need a map.

In a community college classroom, planning becomes teachable when instructors design assignments so planning must happen before drafting, studying, or submitting. A composition instructor can ask students to submit a short planning sheet that names the claim, names the audience, lists two possible counterclaims, and states what evidence is needed. A biology instructor can ask students to submit a study plan that includes two retrieval sessions across the week, not one long cramming session, and that plan can list the specific topics the student expects to retrieve rather than vague statements about studying chapters. A statistics instructor can ask students to submit a problem solving plan that states which formula family they believe the problem belongs to and why, before they compute. These small planning moves shift students from doing tasks to managing tasks.

Planning also becomes teachable when instructors model it. Modeling is not telling students to plan. Modeling is showing what planning sounds like in real time. An instructor might narrate, in plain language, what she is doing before she begins a task. She might name the goal, identify what she already knows, name what she needs to find out, and choose a strategy. Students who have never heard this language inside the discipline can begin to imitate it. They

begin to see that expert work involves decisions before action. This is the first step in making thinking visible.

Scaffolding is the structure that supports this visibility. In a community college setting, scaffolding is not remediation in disguise. It is an equity-minded design choice that makes rigorous tasks accessible by showing the path through them. Dede and Sochacki describe scaffolding as a roadmap that helps students understand where they are, where they are going, and how they will get there (Dede & Sochacki, 2021). Their examples emphasize simple tools that clarify the sequence of complex work. A matrix makes time visible and turns deadlines into a plan.

A mind map helps students organize ideas before drafting. Templates and examples clarify what quality looks like, and rubrics make criteria legible. These tools are not add ons. They are the architecture that supports independence. These supports allow students to explore what strategies work best for them.

A matrix is one of the simplest and most powerful planning scaffolds in two-year college teaching. A matrix does not merely list due dates. It shows stages, dependencies, and approximate time. It teaches students that a major assignment is not one task. It is a sequence of tasks that build on each other. When students see that sequence early, they can make decisions about work schedules and childcare. They can also stop imagining that strong work appears in one sitting. The matrix can become part of class culture. Students learn to ask, when they feel behind, which stage they are in and what the next small step is. That is planning made practical.

A matrix is a structured planning tool that visually organizes a complex academic task into sequential stages across time. Unlike a simple list of due dates, a matrix shows how each stage of work builds toward the next, making dependencies and workload visible rather than

assumed. It typically aligns tasks with time estimates, checkpoints, and specific cognitive actions such as researching, drafting, revising, or self-testing. For students, the matrix externalizes expert planning by modeling how experienced learners distribute effort and avoid last-minute collapse. As an instructional scaffold, the matrix reduces cognitive overload by shifting attention away from guessing what to do next and toward engaging in the thinking the task requires.

The first time a class uses a matrix, the shift is immediate. A student who has been overwhelmed by a major paper now sees the work broken into steps across weeks. The matrix lists small deliverables, each connected to a later stage. Topic selection becomes a short submission rather than a private struggle. A source check becomes a way to redirect research before a student invests hours in the wrong material. An outline becomes a product that receives feedback, not an optional step. The instructor's feedback at these checkpoints is different from end stage grading. It is process feedback that prompts strategy changes. In this way, scaffolding and metacognition work together. The scaffold structures the work, and metacognitive prompts turn the structure into student action.

Monitoring is the second hinge. Monitoring is what students do while they are learning to decide whether they understand and whether their strategy is producing what they want. Monitoring is different from checking boxes. It is a moment of diagnostic attention. Students often delay monitoring until grades arrive because delayed monitoring avoids discomfort. Yet delayed monitoring is expensive because it wastes time and increases anxiety. Monitoring is teachable when instructors provide routines that require students to check understanding before stakes are high.

Stanton and colleagues highlight the importance of monitoring accuracy and show why students need help calibrating. They describe how students often rate confidence based on

recognition rather than recall, which produces overconfidence and premature stopping (Stanton et al., 2021). They also emphasize that retrieval practice, including self testing, improves monitoring accuracy because it forces the student to see what can be retrieved from memory. When students can retrieve, they know. When they cannot, they know exactly what to revisit. Monitoring becomes data.

In a community college classroom, monitoring can be embedded as a routine that is small and frequent. A teacher can begin each class with two retrieval questions and a confidence rating. The confidence rating is not a game. It is a metacognitive measure. Students compare their confidence with performance and begin to see patterns. Some students are confident and correct. Others are confident and wrong. Others are uncertain but correct. These patterns give students information about how they judge their learning. The instructor can then teach that the goal is not confidence alone. The goal is accurate confidence tied to retrieval. Over time, this routine changes how students study because they learn that rereading produces familiarity but retrieval produces evidence.

Monitoring is also supported by teacher clarity. Students cannot monitor effectively if they do not know what counts as understanding in this course. Benton and Li describe teacher clarity as one of the teaching behaviors most strongly associated with student success, and they note that clarity is co created through interaction, with feedback loops that help instructors adapt to students' informational needs (Benton & Li, 2021). They also note that online courses can require additional clarity around logistics because online readers skim and read nonlinearly, which can cause them to miss important information, and they describe how consistent unit structures can reduce logistical confusion (Benton & Li, 2021). Community college courses are often hybrid even when they meet face to face, with assignments and information housed in

online systems. Clarity in navigation and expectations is therefore an equity issue. When course structures are predictable, students spend less time searching and more time learning.

Clarity supports monitoring because it provides stable reference points. Students know where to find criteria, how to interpret rubrics, and what the purpose of an activity is. In a clear class, a student can ask themselves, while working, whether their draft matches the criteria, whether their solution includes the required steps, and whether they can explain the concept in the way the course expects. Without clarity, students monitor the wrong thing. They monitor whether the work looks long enough rather than whether the thinking is sound.

An and Cao's study shows how monitoring can be supported through prompts during the task. They provided question prompts during the design process such as asking learners whether they were on the right track, whether they were making good use of time, and whether they were using effective strategies, and they found that these prompts supported process gains including monitoring and evaluation behaviors (An & Cao, 2014). Monitoring is often the missing step in student work. A student who writes a draft may not stop to check whether the draft actually answers the prompt or meets criteria. A student who studies may not test whether they can retrieve and apply. Monitoring prompts provide a pause that changes outcomes.

Evaluation is the third hinge. Evaluation is what students do after a task to decide what worked, what did not, and what will change next time. Evaluation is often treated as reflection, yet reflection becomes useful only when it produces a revised plan. Stanton and colleagues describe evaluation as appraising prior plans and adjusting them for future learning, and they note that providing answer keys with explanations and reflection questions can support students in evaluating their learning (Stanton et al., 2021). In practice, evaluation can be built into short routines after assessments and assignments. Students complete a brief reflection that asks what

strategy they used, what evidence suggests it worked or did not work, and what they will do differently. This is not journaling for its own sake. It is a way to turn experience into a revised plan.

A common evaluation moment occurs after the first exam. A student who believes they studied hard receives a low score and feels embarrassed. Without a process frame, the student may decide they are not good at the subject. With a process frame, the instructor guides the student to evaluate strategy. The student can be asked how they studied, when they studied, and what they did while studying. Often the student realizes they reread and highlighted the content. They realize they did not practice retrieval. They realize they studied the night before. They realize they did not do space practice. That realization can be painful, yet it is also liberating because it locates the problem in strategy choice rather than personal ability. The next step is the revised plan. The student commits to two short self testing sessions across the week and to an interleaved practice set rather than blocked repetition.

Academic buoyancy and resilience research helps explain why this shift matters emotionally. Anderson and colleagues describe academic buoyancy as the ability to “fail well, fail forward, and bounce back from the inevitable challenges experienced in school” (Anderson et al., 2020, p. 4). They frame resilience as a process of adaptation rather than an innate trait, and they emphasize the role of teachers in modeling and messaging that normalizes mistakes and teaches coping and planning processes (Anderson et al., 2020). When evaluation is framed as a normal part of learning, students can recover from setbacks with more composure and more control.

The emotional experience of learning is not separate from metacognition. It is part of why students avoid monitoring and evaluation. It can feel safer not to test because testing might

reveal gaps. It can feel safer not to reflect because reflection might confirm that time was wasted. Yet avoidance keeps students trapped in ineffective routines. Anderson and colleagues emphasize that managing anxiety and fear of failure is central to everyday academic buoyancy and that classroom climates that expect and respect mistakes can reduce avoidance and support recovery (Anderson et al., 2020). This supports a community college teaching stance that treats errors as information and makes revision the normal response. When instructors model how to respond to a wrong answer by locating the misunderstanding, selecting a different strategy, and trying again, they teach a process students can use in every course.

Higher order thinking becomes more accessible when planning, monitoring, and evaluation are routine, because higher order thinking requires cognitive room. Students cannot analyze, synthesize, or evaluate when they are spending most of their attention guessing what an assignment is asking. Close reading research illustrates this relationship between structured struggle and deep thinking. Fisher and Frey examined teacher and student perspectives on a close reading protocol and found that participants recognized close reading as useful for deep analysis while also describing it as demanding and tiring. They summarize that “Students were tired as a result of close reading instruction” (Fisher & Frey, 2014, p. 29). They also report that students appreciated the approach even though it was mentally exhausting and that close reading required more effort (Fisher & Frey, 2014). The fatigue matters because it signals that students were engaged in sustained cognitive work. The key is that the struggle was structured.

The close reading protocol includes a clear purpose for reading, multiple readings, annotation, and discussion guided by text dependent questions that move from literal understanding to inference and critical thinking (Fisher & Frey, 2014). This structure shows how higher order thinking can be taught through sequences. Students do not begin with evaluation.

They begin with the flow of a text. They return with a pencil. They name confusion. They identify key details. They build vocabulary understanding in context. They examine the author's purpose. They infer. Only then do they move into argument and connection. This progression is not about reducing complexity. It is about staging complexity so students can climb.

In community colleges, close reading is not only for English classes. It is a disciplined habit across fields. In a health sciences course, close reading might involve analyzing a patient scenario and identifying which details matter for a decision. In a sociology course, it might involve reading a policy argument and tracking evidence and claims. In a business course, it might involve reading a case and evaluating tradeoffs. The same principles apply. Students need a clear purpose, a way to annotate or mark thinking, questions that push beyond literal recall, and discussion that requires evidence. When students learn to return to a text and justify an interpretation, they are practicing analysis and evaluation.

Faculty can teach close reading and academic note taking as an integrated routine rather than as separate skills by modeling the process in real time with course texts. An instructor might begin by reading a short passage aloud, pausing to annotate key terms, questions, and claims in the margins while explaining why each mark matters for comprehension. Students then practice annotating independently and transfer those annotations into two-sided notes, with direct quotations or data on one side and interpretations, questions, or connections on the other. From those notes, the instructor guides students to build an outline that mirrors the structure of the text, showing how claims, evidence, and reasoning are organized before asking students to apply the same outline logic to their own writing. Taught this way, close reading, annotating, outlining, and two sided notes become a single cognitive workflow that helps students move from understanding a text to producing structured academic thinking of their own.

Social metacognition becomes visible in these discussions. Stanton and colleagues highlight social metacognition during group work and describe it as involving awareness and control of others' thinking, such as when students share ideas, invite peers to evaluate them, and evaluate ideas shared by peers (Stanton et al., 2021). In a community college classroom, social metacognition can become a structure for equity because it gives students multiple entry points. A student who is hesitant to speak in a whole class discussion may first speak to a partner. A student who is unsure may test an idea in a small group. Peer evaluation becomes part of the learning process rather than a threat.

Scaffolding supports higher order thinking by gradually releasing responsibility. A teacher models the thinking first so students can see what expert thinking looks like. Then students practice with support, then with peers, then independently. In this arc, metacognitive prompts keep the focus on strategy and regulation. Students are asked what their goal is, what they already know, what strategy they will use, and how they will know whether it worked. These prompts can be simple and repeated until they become part of the classroom language. When students can name the strategy they used and can evaluate whether it worked, they become more capable of transferring learning to the next course.

The online environment can strengthen these dynamics when instructor feedback is designed as scaffolding rather than as transactional correction. Reingold, Rimor, and Kalay examined an online course and found that “A strong positive correlation was found between the instructor’s responses and students’ metacognitive thinking” (Reingold et al., 2008, p. 145). They emphasize the importance of instructor feedback for producing an environment where students experience learning through reflective and metacognitive processes. Their findings also show what types of scaffolds matter in online spaces, including support that presents the

rationale for tasks, links readings to objectives, supports reflective writing, supervises comprehension, and focuses attention on the process of learning (Reingold et al., 2008).

This evidence fits community college realities where many courses are hybrid or online. When feedback is absent, students interpret online learning as a set of submissions rather than a learning process. Reingold and colleagues note that when students do not receive external feedback, they fail to initiate metacognitive processes, and learning achievements are low (Reingold et al., 2008). This does not mean instructors must respond to everything with lengthy comments. It means that feedback should be designed to elicit reflection and strategy adjustment. A targeted question can do more than a paragraph of correction. Instructors can provide feedback that names a pattern and prompts a next step, such as asking the student to test themselves on a concept before revising, or asking the student to identify the sentence where their argument shifts and rewrite it for clarity. This is feedback that builds independence.

Student centered learning becomes relevant here when it is framed as structured autonomy supported by scaffolding and metacognitive routine. Cohill describes student centered learning as characterized by tailoring instruction to meet individual needs, giving students greater autonomy and input, employing active learning strategies, and getting students to reflect on what they are learning and how they are learning (Cohill, 2023). He also notes that the teacher acts as a guide and facilitator rather than solely an information provider (Cohill, 2023). In a community college classroom, this can look like offering choices in topics, examples, or formats while keeping criteria stable. Students might choose a case study related to their work life, yet use the same analytic framework and rubric. Students might choose whether to demonstrate understanding in writing or in a short recorded explanation, yet still be held to the same reasoning standards.

The most important aspect of this student centered framing for the chapter is reflection. Reflection is the bridge between experience and revised strategy. Cohill emphasizes that student centered shifts can happen through small, purposeful moves rather than through an all at once transformation (2023). These ideas fit community college realities where time is tight. A class can end with a two minute reflection that asks students to name one strategy they used today and one strategy they will use before the next class. Over time, these small moments build metacognitive language and routine.

At the institutional level, the conditions that support student learning processes mirror the conditions that support student coherence. A student does not experience the institution as an organizational chart. A student experiences the institution as a series of touchpoints. Some touchpoints are in class. Some are advising. Some are in tutoring. Some are in financial aid. When those touchpoints are coherent, students are less likely to get lost. A student who fails a quiz needs two things at once. The student needs a study strategy adjustment and the student may need a referral to support. Faculty cannot carry this alone, yet faculty are often the first to see early signals. When faculty have clear information about support and clear ways to connect students, the classroom becomes a place where academic habits and support navigation are part of student success.

Technology can help with coherence when it is used to automate routine transactions and free time for relationship based support, yet the underlying change is cultural and procedural, not technological. The shift is from a fragmented experience to an integrated experience. That shift has a classroom parallel. Instructors can automate some information by making course structures consistent, by posting clear weekly overviews, and by using simple templates, which frees time for feedback that prompts strategy adjustment. Benton and Li's emphasis on clarity in structure

and feedback loops aligns with this logic (Benton & Li, 2021). When students can find what they need, they can focus on thinking.

In community college courses, there are several recurring scenes where these ideas become tangible. One is the first major writing assignment. Another is the first high stakes exam. Another is the first group project. In each case, students are asked to do complex work that requires planning and monitoring and evaluation. Without scaffolding, students improvise. They guess what the teacher wants. They complete tasks at the last minute. They interpret low grades as proof that they are not good at school. With scaffolding and metacognitive instruction, the same tasks become teachable sequences. The writing assignment becomes a series of deliverables with feedback at each stage. The exam becomes a place where students learn to retrieve and calibrate rather than to reread and hope. The group project becomes a space where students practice social metacognition by explaining strategies and evaluating reasoning together.

Reflection for students must extend beyond what they learned to include how they learned and why particular strategies succeeded or failed. When students reflect only on content, they may remember information without understanding the conditions that produced learning. Reflection on practice asks students to examine how they studied, how they approached reading or problem solving, and how they responded when confusion emerged. Reflection on process then moves one step further by helping students identify patterns across tasks, such as whether they planned early, monitored understanding, or adjusted strategies when needed. This kind of reflection transforms experience into usable knowledge, allowing students to enter future tasks with greater intentionality rather than repeating habits by default.

Reflection is equally important for professors, though it often occurs under different pressures and constraints. Faculty reflection allows instructors to examine not only what students

produced, but how instructional design, pacing, and scaffolding shaped student thinking. When professors reflect on moments where students disengaged, misunderstood, or succeeded unexpectedly, they gain insight into how clarity, structure, and feedback influenced learning processes. This reflection supports instructional adjustment without framing student difficulty as deficit or failure. Over time, reflective teaching strengthens alignment between instructional intent and student experience, making learning processes more visible, teachable, and equitable.

The design of these experiences is where higher order thinking becomes ordinary. Higher order thinking does not appear when instructors simply ask harder questions. It appears when students have enough structure and clarity to devote attention to analysis and synthesis and evaluation. Close reading research shows that students can engage in that work, even when it is tiring, when purpose and questioning and discussion create a coherent protocol (Fisher & Frey, 2014). Metacognition research shows that students can learn to study more effectively when instructors teach strategies such as self testing, spacing, and interleaving and build routines that make monitoring accurate (Stanton et al., 2021). Scaffolding research shows that students plan more effectively when planning is required and supported with templates and feedback, and that such scaffolds reduce overwhelm and support time use (An & Cao, 2014). Clarity research shows that students respond to clear instruction and that clarity is built through interaction and feedback loops that reduce confusion and support learning (Benton & Li, 2021). Resilience and buoyancy research shows that students can respond to setbacks with more adaptive coping when classrooms normalize mistakes and teach emotional regulation and planning and reflection as part of learning (Anderson et al., 2020).

When these threads are woven together, the classroom becomes a place where students learn how to learn. They learn that effective study is not about time alone, and that retrieval is a

better indicator of learning than recognition. They learn that complex tasks are built through sequences and checkpoints rather than through last minute bursts. They learn that confusion is expected and can be named, and that strategies can be adjusted. They learn that feedback is not a verdict but an invitation to revise. They learn that fatigue can signal meaningful cognitive work rather than inadequacy. They also learn how to ask for support and how to use institutional resources when life pressures interfere with learning.

Teaching and modeling for adjunct faculty the importance of embedding scaffolding, study skills, and metacognition in community college teaching creates conditions where students can move from passive compliance to active agency. Agency here is not framed as personal grit. It is framed as a set of learned routines supported by instruction and by institutional coherence. Students become more able to plan, monitor, and evaluate their work, and therefore more able to engage in higher order thinking tasks that require analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. The most visible change is often in classroom talk. Students begin to explain why they chose a strategy. They begin to justify an answer with evidence rather than guess. They begin to evaluate what worked and what did not and to name what they will do differently next time. Those are the sounds of metacognition becoming ordinary.

In community colleges, that ordinariness is a form of equity. It means the hidden rules are no longer hidden. It means the strategies that have long benefited students with prior access to academic culture are taught openly. It means students who arrive with strong responsibilities and uneven academic preparation are not asked to guess their way through. They are taught how learning works in college, how to manage thinking in tasks, and how to persist through difficulty with revised strategies and clearer plans. Teaching becomes the place where students learn

content and learn how to learn. When that happens, the course becomes more than a requirement. It becomes a turning point.

Key Takeaways

Chapter 9, Movement III: Designing for Students: Inclusive, Multilingual, Responsive Pedagogy MOVEMENT

When students are asked to plan, monitor, and make sense of their own learning, the invisible work of scaffolding and metacognition often determines whether they gain the confidence and clarity needed to move forward. Adjuncts are the ones who most often teach these foundational habits of mind, making academic processes visible and doable, making their role as pivotal change agents in shaping students' long-term success becomes unmistakable.

CHAPTER TEN:

VOCATIONAL ALIGNMENT, TRANSFER, AND WORKFORCE PATHWAYS

A student scrolls through a job posting while waiting in line for coffee before class. The title matches the program name printed on a course plan, and the wage briefly feels like relief. The posting shifts into requirements, and that relief turns into calculation. An associate degree is listed as preferred, a certificate is named that the student does not recognize, and experience is described without clear numbers. The student closes the screen and opens it again, not to reread for interest, but to decide whether applying now is realistic or reckless. The moment is small, yet it shows how career decisions appear inside academic time rather than after it.

Another student is learning the language of college at the same time. Registration deadlines arrive before advising appointments, financial aid rules shape course loads, and program maps list requirements without explaining which ones function as gates. The labor market has its own language, including preferred qualifications, required credentials, wage ranges, and expectations about experience that are not explicitly stated. Neither system pauses to explain itself, and students are asked to coordinate both systems while balancing work, family responsibilities, and instability. Kim observed that “student attention at LaGuardia has always been divided,” and this divided attention is visible in how students juggle language learning, multiple jobs, caregiving, and uncertainty while attending college (Kim, 2025). Coordination is not a side task in this context, it is the environment of learning.

For many students, coordination appears as a sequence of constrained decisions rather than open choice. The Online by Design report notes that 64% of learners work, 24% are parents, and three out of five experience housing or food insecurity (Center for Higher Education Policy

and Practice [CHEPP], 2025, p. 4). The same report notes that more than one third of students identify as “a worker that goes to school” rather than a student with a job (CHEPP, 2025, p. 4). When time and money are scarce, school planning and career planning occur in the same mental space. Courses that ignore this reality implicitly require students to complete their most complex planning alone. Courses that acknowledge it treat planning as a teachable practice rather than a private struggle.

Workforce exploration and career research belong inside community college courses because the questions arise during course time. Career pathways research defines pathways as “a sequence of connected educational and training programs” aligned with industry needs (Cotner et al., 2021, p. 1). That definition becomes meaningful when students connect course outcomes to posting requirements and posting requirements to credential steps. The practice guide describes clearly defined pathways as providing “an encouraging roadmap” that shows how progression leads to employment opportunities (Cotner et al., 2021, p. 2). A roadmap is not motivational language, it is a usable sequence when time and money are limited. When the sequence is visible, students can plan without relying on guessing.

The two-year college context places workforce entry on the near horizon. Certificates and associate degrees function as employment credentials, and work often begins before a program ends. The career pathways model emphasizes multiple entry and exit points and describes how individuals may enter and exit at multiple points as they advance (Cotner et al., 2021, p. 2). This framing aligns with students who need income quickly and students who plan to return for additional education later. Employment is not a distraction from learning in many students’ lives, it is often the condition that allows learning to continue. Workforce preparation therefore cannot be postponed until after completion, because the labor market is already present.

The urgency of near-term employment shapes how students interpret credentials. Credential literacy refers to the ability to interpret what a credential does in hiring and wages and what it does not do, using evidence employers publish in postings. It includes distinguishing between required and preferred qualifications and noticing how those terms function as gates. It also includes comparing multiple postings to identify patterns rather than treating one listing as the whole market. When students learn this practice, they waste less time and carry less shame because a rejection looks less like personal failure and more like a structural filter. The posting becomes a text that can be read, annotated, and tested.

Wage literacy develops alongside credential literacy and changes the questions students ask. Wage literacy is the ability to interpret compensation over time and under real conditions rather than treating a single number as the whole story. Students learn to translate hourly wages into annual earnings and to ask what the posting leaves unsaid about benefits, hours, and stability. A higher hourly wage can still signal instability when hours fluctuate or when benefits are absent. The Online by Design report emphasizes that career connection strategies must be designed around adult learner circumstances (CHEPP, 2025, p. 25). Interpreting wages becomes part of persistence because wages shape whether continuing enrollment is possible.

The long term value of credentials shapes wage and credential decisions even when students focus on immediate employment. The Online by Design report notes that labor market outcomes for short term credentials can be inconsistent and that wages often plateau without intentional design (CHEPP, 2025, p. 5). The report also notes differences in employment rates, with certificate holders employed at lower rates than associate and bachelor's degree holders (CHEPP, 2025, p. 5). These data do not dictate what an individual should do, but they clarify why students need a method for comparing pathways. A certificate may function as a first step

rather than an endpoint, and that possibility requires planning for reentry. Credential literacy supports that planning because it makes the relationship between postings and credentials visible.

Wage literacy also clarifies the difference between wages and conditions. The Online by Design report notes that paid internships are associated with higher early earnings and reports that students with paid internships earn nearly \$5,000 more in their first year (CHEPP, 2025, p. 13). This evidence clarifies why unpaid experiences are inequitable for students who rely on wages. Students still need the skills associated with work based learning, such as communication and problem solving, yet they cannot always trade hours for unpaid experience. Course embedded projects and simulations become the place those skills can be practiced without requiring students to absorb economic loss. The point is not to devalue work based learning, but to design access to its benefits under real constraints.

Embedding career work in courses also addresses a reach problem in career services. The Online by Design report notes that only 16% of undergraduate students found career services to be helpful, and that fewer than one in four students at two-year institutions receive quality education to career guidance (CHEPP, 2025, p. 2). Students can complete a term without visiting a career office even while career questions accumulate. This gap is not a moral failure of students, it is a design mismatch between optional services and constrained lives. Embedding career exploration into required courses shifts career preparation into the one place students reliably attend. When access is structural rather than voluntary, equity is less dependent on extra time.

Work based learning creates another access problem that course design has to address directly. The Online by Design report describes that learners who participate in work based learning courses are four percentage points more likely to be employed one year after college

(CHEPP, 2025, p. 13). Yet it also reports that about 70% of learners said conflicts with outside employment posed a barrier to internship participation (CHEPP, 2025, p. 14). Students may want internships while knowing that lost wages would make rent impossible or destabilize caregiving arrangements. Course embedded simulations and applied projects become realistic alternatives when paired with career research that helps students name what those alternatives demonstrate. The alternative is not a second best substitute, it is a different design for access.

The career pathways practice guide makes the design stance explicit by arguing that supports should be integrated. It states that supports “should be intentionally integrated into the student experience so they are unavoidable as students progress along their career pathway” (Cotner et al., 2021, p. 9). Unavoidable supports are not limited to offices and appointments, and they can take the form of course routines that teach students how to interpret job language, credential language, and wage language. A support that depends on extra time outside class will be accessed unevenly. A routine embedded in required coursework reaches students systematically. Embedded career research therefore functions as equity work because it reduces dependence on time and social capital.

Career exploration gains power when treated as a continuum rather than a single event. The Online by Design report states that “Career connectivity is both a pathway and a continuum” (CHEPP, 2025, p. 7). A pathway suggests sequencing, starting early and building, while a continuum suggests increasing intensity from exploration into exposure and then into experiences that resemble work. Students benefit when exploration begins early and repeats across courses, especially when goals and expectations are clear. The report frames resume development and interview preparation as part of a broader continuum rather than the entire

strategy (CHEPP, 2025, p. 7). The design implication is that career learning belongs across the curriculum rather than in isolated workshops.

Embedding career strategies into existing commitments is a central feasibility question for adult learners. The Online by Design report identifies “Embedded into Existing Commitments” as a key element and emphasizes minimizing the additional time learners need to spend to acquire experience (CHEPP, 2025, p. 18). When an existing course artifact can be repurposed as evidence for a resume bullet, a student does not need to invent a separate career project. When posting analysis is built into course routines, the work happens inside scheduled learning time. This design respects the reality that many learners are workers who attend school. Efficiency is not a lower standard, it is a condition for sustained participation.

Flexible delivery also supports the feasibility of embedded career research. The career pathways guide recommends offering flexible instructional schedules and models to improve credit accumulation and completion of credentials (Cotner et al., 2021, p. 30). Kim described how online and hybrid formats can function as lifelines for nontraditional students when they make completion possible (Kim, 2025). The point is not modality by itself, it is whether design keeps learning coherent when time is divided. Embedded career research fits across modalities because postings, wage data, and drafts can be accessed asynchronously and discussed briefly during class time. When the work is portable, it aligns with students’ fragmented schedules.

Student uncertainty often concentrates in a single word. Preferred can sound gentle while functioning as a screen, and required can sound final while describing an entry step that is achievable within a term. Credential literacy includes learning how these terms operate by comparing postings across employers and noticing what repeats. A pattern emerges when preferred appears in nearly every posting in a region, which suggests that the term behaves like

required even when the label is softer. Career research teaches students to look for patterns rather than betting everything on one listing. When students can interpret language as a labor market structure, they can plan without internalizing the structure as personal deficiency. This shift is a practical form of support.

A second uncertainty appears when credential labels are unfamiliar. A student may assume that completing any certificate in a department will satisfy a posting, then discover that an employer meant a specific industry credential verified by an examination. Credential literacy includes learning to ask what a credential is called, who issues it, and how it is verified. The point is not to punish misunderstanding, it is to teach verification before investment. When verification is practiced inside courses, students learn a method they can reuse outside the classroom. The method reduces wasted time and reduces the risk that students will spend limited resources on a credential that does not match employer requirements.

Wage literacy becomes visible when students compare roles and realize that a wage difference is smaller or more complex than expected. A student may notice that a higher wage role lists irregular hours and no benefits, while a lower wage role lists health coverage and predictable scheduling. Wage literacy includes learning to treat compensation as a package rather than a number, and learning to ask what hours are guaranteed and whether overtime is expected. These calculations can be taught as quantitative reasoning without asking students to disclose private household income. The Online by Design report emphasizes the need for efficient pathways aligned with adult learner circumstances (CHEPP, 2025, p. 4). When wage interpretation is taught as academic reasoning, it becomes less shame based and more usable.

Credit for prior learning is an additional site where vocational alignment and equity become visible in institutional practice. Many community college students arrive with

college-level learning acquired through work, military service, industry training, caregiving, or prior coursework that did not result in a credential. When that learning is not recognized, students are asked to repeat competencies they already possess, extending time to completion and increasing cost. Credit for prior learning provides a mechanism for translating experience into academic credit through structured evaluation rather than informal assumption. The value of this practice is not acceleration alone, but recognition. When learning is acknowledged as legitimate regardless of where it occurred, students are positioned as knowledgeable rather than deficient.

For students, knowing that credit for prior learning exists changes how they interpret both their experience and the institution. Without explicit information, students often assume that prior learning does not count unless it appears on a transcript. This assumption leads students to underrepresent themselves, enroll in unnecessary coursework, or delay completion without understanding why progress feels slow. When students are taught how credit for prior learning works, including its limits and documentation requirements, they gain a method for evaluating whether assessment is worth pursuing. The process becomes a decision rather than a mystery. Transparency allows students to weigh time, cost, and effort using evidence rather than guesswork.

Credit for prior learning also intersects directly with workforce pathways and transfer planning. When prior learning is articulated into credit, students can move more efficiently through program sequences and reach workforce entry points sooner without sacrificing rigor. Knowing how credit applies to specific credentials helps students avoid assuming that all experience is interchangeable or that all credits transfer equally. This knowledge supports more accurate planning, particularly for students who expect to work while completing or transferring.

When credit for prior learning is integrated into advising and coursework rather than treated as an exception, it becomes part of pathway literacy. The institution communicates that learning accumulates across contexts and that navigation skills matter as much as accumulation itself.

Career exploration can be embedded through small recurring practices that resemble process teaching. Students can bring a posting to class and mark required qualifications, preferred qualifications, and responsibilities, then name what is unclear. Students can compare postings, identify repetitions, and discuss what those repetitions suggest about the field. Over time, repeated practice builds accuracy and confidence because students learn how to read labor market language rather than react to it. The posting becomes a shared text that can be interpreted together. When interpretation is shared, students without informal networks gain a method rather than relying on luck.

Applied artifacts make this practice concrete across programs and connect course work to hiring language. In human services, an intake simulation can produce an intake note and a referral plan that align with postings for intake specialists and case management assistants. Students can connect documentation, coordination, and client communication in the artifact to responsibilities described in postings. Wage comparisons across roles can then show how credential language shapes eligibility and pay. The associate degree becomes a credential students can use, not only a requirement they must complete. Alignment becomes visible through evidence rather than through advising slogans.

The career pathways guide names hands on learning as part of alignment and includes “project based learning, high fidelity simulations, and experiential field trips” as examples of strategies that align course content with student career interests (Cotner et al., 2021, p. 14). These strategies fit the community college context because they can occur within credit and within

realistic schedules. Students can document what they did, what evidence exists, and what skill the evidence demonstrates. Career research then links that evidence to posting language, which supports accurate self representation. When evidence is explicit, students can speak about their competence without exaggeration. The course therefore supports both learning and employability through the same artifacts.

General education courses are central to vocational alignment because foundational skills are what students carry across roles, employers, and institutions. Composition courses can treat job postings as genres and ask students to revise course writing into professional forms such as memos or summaries. Quantitative reasoning courses can use wage ranges to teach comparison, annual earnings calculations, and interpretation of variability. Speech courses can require short explanations of course projects aimed at an employer audience rather than a classroom audience. These practices preserve academic rigor while clarifying why foundational skills matter in the labor market. When students see writing, math, and communication as transferable, general education becomes part of workforce preparation rather than separate from it.

Business and management pathways offer clear examples of how applied artifacts align with workplace expectations. Students often produce process maps, improvement memos, or basic project plans that resemble workplace products. When those artifacts are compared to postings for office assistant, operations assistant, or coordinator roles, students can see how expectations for responsibility and decision making shift across levels. Oschinski and colleagues reported that technical skills account for about 27% of in demand skills, while foundational, social, and thinking skills together account for nearly 58% (Oschinski et al., 2024, p. 1). This comparison helps students recognize communication and coordination as labor market skills rather than personal traits. Career research makes the skill shift visible rather than assumed.

Information technology pathways further demonstrate that technical work is inseparable from explanation. Students may document troubleshooting steps or translate solutions into language a nontechnical user can follow. Postings for help desk and support roles often emphasize documentation, communication, and customer interaction alongside technical tasks. Oschinski and colleagues identify social perceptiveness and complex problem solving as central to in-demand roles, even in technically focused fields (Oschinski et al., 2024, p. 1). Career research helps students name these competencies accurately rather than underestimating them. When explanation is recognized as work, students can represent their skills more confidently.

Early childhood education provides an example where documentation is itself the labor. Students write observation records and family communication notes, then read postings that emphasize documentation and engagement. Revising course documents into professional genres shows students that writing is not an abstract academic exercise. Writing is part of daily practice in the field. The career pathways guide defines contextualized instruction as linking foundational skills with occupational content through concrete applications (Cotner et al., 2021, p. 4). When students see documentation as employable evidence, coursework gains immediate relevance.

Career exposure practices can be embedded as preparation, interaction, and reflection rather than as isolated events. Planning guides describe career exploration experiences that include classroom preparation, structured interaction, and reflection afterward (Maldonado & Baker Wright, 2019, p. 6). These elements translate into guest speakers, virtual site visits, and informational interviews embedded in courses. Preparation helps students ask informed questions rather than generic ones. Reflection helps students connect what they observed to posting language and credential requirements. The experience becomes learning rather than passive exposure.

Networking becomes less mysterious when taught as a skill rather than treated as personality. Students can practice writing concise informational interview requests grounded in research and tied to specific postings. During interviews or speaker sessions, students can practice note taking focused on tasks, credentials, and advancement pathways. Maldonado and Baker Wright provide tools for active listening, preparation, and reflection that can be adapted for course use (2019). These routines teach students how to gather information systematically. Students without informal networks gain a method rather than relying on chance.

Adjunct instructors are often particularly well positioned to teach these practices because of their proximity to current field conditions. Students frequently perceive adjunct faculty as closer to hiring realities and workplace expectations. Faculty surveys report that an overwhelming majority of faculty are asked for career advice by students, and that most faculty already integrate career readiness into their classes (Gatta et al., 2024, p. 4). In many community college programs, adjuncts teach the courses where career questions arise most directly. Their explanations about why a credential matters or how a role functions locally reduce guesswork for students. The credibility of interpretation often matters as much as the information itself.

This work cannot rely on individual goodwill or unpaid labor from faculty. The faculty survey shows that instructors who do not integrate career learning most often cite time constraints and lack of labor market information (Gatta et al., 2024, pp. 9, 17). Adjunct faculty often face tighter time limits and less compensated preparation time than full time faculty. Professional development must therefore be practical, modular, and immediately usable. Templates for posting analysis, resume translation, and reflection reduce preparation burden. When integration is feasible, it becomes more equitable across sections.

Employer partnerships strengthen course embedded career work when they function as feedback loops rather than one time exposure. The career pathways guide emphasizes employer engagement as a strategy for advancing labor market success (Cotner et al., 2021, p. 46). Students experience partnerships through guest speakers, project feedback, or short site visits. Those experiences are more useful when students have practiced reading and posting language and can ask targeted questions. Career research turns employer interaction into information rather than inspiration. Students leave with a clearer understanding of what evidence matters.

Artificial intelligence enters career practices naturally when framed as a tool that supports process rather than replacing thinking. Oschinski and colleagues describe AI as a general purpose technology and report that up to 80% of U.S. workers may have at least 10% of their work activities affected by large language models (2024, p. 1). They also note that technical skills become outdated in less than five years on average (Oschinski et al., 2024, p. 1). These trends increase the value of foundational, social, and thinking skills. They also increase the need for careful boundaries in tool use.

The workforce training brief warns that overreliance on AI tools may hinder genuine learning and skill development (Oschinski et al., 2024, p. 1). Courses can operationalize boundaries through verification and reflection rather than prohibition. Students can be required to submit the posting, the prompt used, and a brief memo explaining how output was checked. Generic claims can be replaced with evidence drawn from course artifacts. The tool supports speed, while the student performs evaluation and judgment. Accountability remains with the learner.

Cover letter and resume assignments make these boundaries visible. A student may ask a tool to generate a draft paragraph, then underline each skill claim. The student replaces vague

claims with evidence from a specific project or assignment. The student checks that language aligns with the posting without copying it. The grade reflects evidence and accuracy rather than polish. Tool use becomes part of a process rather than a shortcut.

Interview preparation can also use AI without outsourcing thinking. A student can ask a tool to generate likely interview questions based on a posting, then sort which questions are supported by the posting and which are generic. The student drafts answers that cite specific projects and outcomes. Speaking answers aloud reveals where evidence is missing. Revision strengthens credibility. The tool prompts rehearsal, but the student constructs meaning.

AI can also support informational interview preparation. Students can use tools to generate draft question lists, then revise those questions based on postings they have analyzed. Generic questions are removed and replaced with questions tied to credentials, schedules, and advancement. Maldonado and Baker Wright emphasize preparation before exploration and reflection afterward (2019, p. 6). AI can reduce blank page anxiety while revision keeps thinking central. The student enters conversations with purpose rather than uncertainty.

Equity concerns sharpen in AI use because tools may misrecognize nontraditional experience or reproduce bias. Oschinski and colleagues warn that algorithmic systems may exacerbate inequality through misclassification and unequal access (2024, p. 1). Courses can respond by teaching students to treat output as a hypothesis to be tested. Verification memos explain what was kept, what was changed, and what evidence supports the final text. Process becomes protection. Students learn to guard accuracy and credibility.

Students who plan to transfer still benefit from embedded career research because employment often continues during transfer. The associate degree functions as a credential signal during this phase, particularly in roles that support continued enrollment. The career pathways

model supports this continuity through the idea of exit and reentry points (Cotner et al., 2021, p. 2). Career research practices travel because they are methods rather than events. Students continue reading postings, interpreting wages, and translating coursework into evidence. Transfer becomes continuation rather than interruption.

A student's career planning often begins with a difficult question about whether a credential will support a living wage. The Online by Design report notes that 90% of prospective students pursue college to increase earnings (CHEPP, 2025, p. 2). The answer to that question depends on region, employer, schedule, and credential language. A course that treats this question as normal gives students a place to build clarity. Career research replaces rumor with analysis. Decision making becomes grounded rather than anxious.

Repeated routines support this clarity over time. A student may bring one posting each week, mark credential requirements, note wage ranges, and identify one course artifact that could serve as evidence. Over time, patterns emerge across employers. The student learns how a labor market functions rather than chasing one job. The career pathways guide frames pathways as connected sequences, and repeated practice helps students see how course sequences align with role sequences (Cotner et al., 2021, p. 1). Learning accumulates through iteration rather than intensity.

Course embedded career work also clarifies a structural problem that students experience as personal confusion. When career guidance is optional and separate, access depends on schedule flexibility, comfort navigating offices, and knowledge of what to ask. The Online by Design report frames career connection as a model that spans curriculum alignment, advising, and work based learning, yet students often experience these elements as scattered touchpoints (CHEPP, 2025, p. 7). A student might attend a guest speaker session and still miss a resume

workshop because work hours change. Embedding the same interpretive skills into courses reduces dependence on attendance at separate events. The outcome is not more tasks, but more consistent access to guidance where students already are.

This approach also supports students who need to understand how short credentials interact with longer plans. The Online by Design report notes that short term credential earnings can plateau and that stackability and transferability matter for long term economic mobility (CHEPP, 2025, p. 5). Students can learn to trace whether a certificate provides credit toward a degree and whether employers treat it as an entry credential or as a supplement. They can also learn to identify which roles list a certificate as sufficient and which list an associate degree as a gate. This tracing is a form of decision support, not a promise that one pathway fits all.

Credential literacy becomes protective because it reduces overestimation and underestimation at the same time. Planning becomes anchored in evidence rather than optimism or fear.

Wage literacy can be taught through small calculations that respect privacy and still support realistic planning. Students do not need to disclose household income to learn how posted wages translate into annual earnings under different hour assumptions. They can calculate the difference between thirty hours and forty hours per week and compare that difference to basic expenses without making the discussion personal. They can also compare a job with benefits to a job without benefits and discuss how benefits alter stability and risk. The Online by Design report emphasizes that adult learners need efficient pathways aligned with their circumstances (CHEPP, 2025, p. 4). Teaching wage interpretation as academic reasoning helps students replace vague assumptions with numbers. The math becomes a form of clarity rather than a test of worth.

Career exploration also includes learning how to approach employers with questions that matter for stability and advancement. Students may want to ask about scheduling, training, or

advancement, yet fear that questions signal weakness. The planning guide describes structures for workplace observation and informational interviewing that can normalize questioning as preparation (Maldonado & Baker Wright, 2019, pp. 6–7). In courses, students can prepare questions tied to specific postings and then practice using those questions with guest speakers or through informational interviews. They can take notes focused on tasks, credentials, and advancement and then write short reflections connecting what they learned back to course content. The method teaches data gathering rather than rumor following. Professional communication becomes a skill students can practice, not a personality trait they either have or lack.

Job shadowing can also be reframed as structured observation rather than passive watching. The planning guide describes workplace tours paired with informational interviews and reflection as a typical structure for exploration (Maldonado & Baker Wright, 2019, pp. 6–7). When shadowing is not feasible because of work schedules, transportation, or caregiving demands, courses can replicate the structure with virtual tours, recorded workplace walkthroughs, or practitioner narrated demonstrations. Students can enter the experience with a checklist of tasks to notice and skills to identify, then connect observations to posting language. This structure improves the quality of exposure because students know what they are looking for. It also reduces the chance that exposure becomes entertainment rather than learning. Reflection consolidates the experience into usable information.

Professional representation is another site where course embedded routines matter for equity. Students often feel pressure to sound confident before they have language for what they can actually do. An elevator pitch can be taught as a genre that requires evidence, not as a performance of charisma. When students use a course artifact as proof, such as a process memo,

intake note, troubleshooting log, or reflection, the pitch becomes more specific and less vague. Students learn to describe what they did, why it mattered, and what they learned in language that aligns with job postings. This process reduces exaggeration because it anchors claims in documented work. Confidence becomes a byproduct of accuracy.

Thank you messages after workplace interactions can also be taught as professional communication rather than etiquette trivia. The planning guide recommends thank you notes or emails that mention specific things learned and include follow up questions (Maldonado & Baker Wright, 2019, p. 16). In courses, students can write short messages after guest speakers or informational interviews that include one learning point and one targeted question. This practice reinforces listening, reflection, and professional tone. It also strengthens partnerships because messages are thoughtful rather than generic. The student learns that maintaining relationships is work that can be practiced. Networking becomes a set of actions rather than an invisible advantage.

Faculty and staff collaboration becomes essential for sustaining these practices across sections. The career pathways guide recommends coordinated comprehensive supports and recognizes that supports must be accessible across student schedules (Cotner et al., 2021, p. 36). Career staff can support instructors by bringing labor market information into class time through brief demonstrations of tools and resources. Staff can also help instructors design assignments that integrate posting analysis, wage interpretation, and artifact translation. This collaboration keeps career support inside the course rather than forcing students to navigate separate systems. It also reduces pressure on adjunct faculty to function as career counselors. Teaching remains central while guidance becomes integrated.

A practical collaboration model also addresses the limits that faculty describe. The faculty survey reports that faculty who do not integrate career readiness most often cite time constraints and lack of expertise, and that faculty report needing labor market information and professional development (Gatta et al., 2024, pp. 9, 17). Professional development for adjunct contexts must be modular, short, and usable immediately. Templates can provide prompts for posting analysis, resume bullet translation, and reflective verification memos. Shared rubrics can help instructors assess evidence, accuracy, and revision rather than surface polish. When materials are standardized, students receive more equitable preparation across sections. Equity is supported through consistency rather than individual improvisation.

Employer partnerships become more meaningful when students arrive prepared to ask questions and to share evidence of their work. The career pathways guide emphasizes leveraging partnerships to prepare students and advance labor market success (Cotner et al., 2021, p. 46). Prepared students can ask about credential requirements, typical schedules, advancement steps, and the kinds of evidence employers value. Employer feedback on student projects can function as a learning loop when students revise work based on feedback rather than simply receiving praise. Career research helps students interpret feedback as information about labor market expectations rather than personal judgment. When feedback is mapped back to posting language, students learn what to emphasize and what to strengthen. Partnership moments become instructional moments.

Artificial intelligence use in career work strengthens the case for teaching verification as part of writing and decision making. Oschinski and colleagues warn about overreliance and emphasize that tool use can hinder genuine learning when it replaces practice (2024, p. 1). They also note risks related to trust and fabrication in AI supported outputs, which becomes salient in

career materials where credibility matters (Oschinski et al., 2024, p. 23). Courses can respond by requiring students to document prompts, retain drafts, and submit verification memos that explain revisions. Students can be required to link each resume or cover letter claim to a course artifact, which discourages invented experience. This approach treats credibility as a skill rather than as an assumed trait. The writing process becomes visible and accessible.

Student services research also supports the idea that AI can reduce friction while still directing students to human judgment. Barrett and colleagues argue that artificial intelligence should be leveraged to create a better student experience and describe tools that can nudge students toward next actions or refer them to advisors when needed (Barrett et al., 2019, pp. 1–3). In coursework, AI can support drafting and rehearsal, while instructors and peers provide feedback and students revise. This mirrors a learner centered design stance where tools support navigation but do not replace decision making. Students learn that tool output is not authority and that accountability remains with the writer. When accountability is explicit, students can use tools without surrendering judgment. The course teaches boundaries as part of literacy.

Equity concerns sharpen in AI use because career tools can misrecognize experience, particularly for marginalized populations and nontraditional trajectories. Oschinski and colleagues describe risks of exacerbating inequality through algorithmic bias and unequal access (2024, p. 1). A course based response is to treat output as a hypothesis to be tested, not as truth. Students can be taught to look for mislabeling of service work, caregiving, informal labor, or community based leadership, and then to translate that experience accurately with evidence. Verification memos make bias detection part of the workflow rather than an afterthought. When bias is treated as a risk that can be managed through process, students gain protective strategies. Protection becomes a form of instruction.

Transfer remains present in workforce focused chapters because students often work while transferring. Transfer does not pause the need for wages, and the associate degree continues to function as a credential signal in the labor market during that phase. The career pathways model emphasizes exit and reentry points, which fits students who move between education and work as circumstances change (Cotner et al., 2021, p. 2). Career research practices learned in two-year colleges travel into transfer contexts because they are methods, not one time events. Students continue reading postings, interpreting requirements, and translating coursework into evidence as they move. Continuity reduces the cognitive burden of starting over with each transition. Skills accumulate across institutions.

The Online by Design report emphasizes learner agency and awareness as part of learner centered design, and career connection strategies can support that agency when embedded (CHEPP, 2025, p. 6). Agency in this context is not a personality trait and not a moral expectation. It is what becomes possible when students have methods for interpreting requirements, wages, and credential sequences. A student who can compare postings and identify patterns can choose a plan with clearer eyes. A student who can ask targeted questions can gather information rather than accept uncertainty. A student who can name evidence from coursework can enter an interview with grounded credibility. Agency becomes visible as a practiced capacity.

Embedding workforce exploration into courses treats students as decision makers rather than passive recipients of a curriculum. Students are already navigating college systems and labor market systems at the same time, and they need methods for interpreting both. Credential literacy helps students read what credentials do in hiring, wages, and advancement, and it reduces wasted investment. Wage literacy helps students interpret pay and stability without shame and supports planning under constraint. Structured exposure and networking practices

teach students how to gather information systematically rather than relying on informal networks. Evidence based representation teaches students how to present competence responsibly. Together, these practices make pathways usable rather than merely described.

When career practices are embedded, community college learning becomes a pathway students can see and use. The career pathways guide emphasizes that pathways are sequences of connected programs aligned with industry needs, and the course level is where students experience that sequence as real (Cotner et al., 2021, p. 1). The Online by Design report emphasizes that career connection must be redesigned for today's learners, many of whom are workers and caregivers with limited time (CHEPP, 2025, p. 4). Embedded routines align with these realities because they occur within existing commitments and within credit. Students do not need to find extra time to begin career research, because the course makes that work unavoidable. Unavoidable does not mean coercive, it means accessible. Access becomes part of instruction.

Alignment becomes concrete when students can connect postings to credentials and connect credentials to course sequences. Transfer becomes navigable when students carry interpretive methods across institutions and continue using evidence based representation. Workforce preparation becomes equitable when supports are integrated rather than optional and when tool use is bounded by verification. Adjunct faculty and employer partnerships strengthen this work when supported by practical professional development and coordinated services. Artificial intelligence increases the urgency of teaching verification because it increases both speed and risk in career writing. When these elements are woven into coursework, the next step becomes readable and therefore more reachable.

Key Takeaways

Chapter 10, Movement IV: Building Institutional Coherence and Sustainable Change

When students try to navigate the realities of work, family, and school, the relevance and clarity of their coursework often determine whether they can imagine a future that feels attainable. Adjuncts bring real-world expertise and are the ones most often helping students connect their learning to actual pathways, proving their role as indispensable change agents in shaping meaningful, future-ready education becomes unmistakable.

CHAPTER ELEVEN:
ASSESSMENT, DATA LITERACY, AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Assessment in community colleges also lives under the shadow of accreditation timelines and accountability demands. Carney and Gorski describe a setting where working under the pressure of accreditation compressed assessment work into rapid cycles that prioritized evidence of progress (2019, para. 12). Pressure can motivate action, but it can also narrow imagination. When timelines are compressed, faculty may focus on producing artifacts that satisfy external expectations rather than building habits that improve learning over time. If colleges want assessment to build capacity rather than exhaustion, they need to design routines that honor the realities of community college work, including the reliance on adjunct faculty and the uneven access to paid time for professional learning.

To build those structures, it helps to name what goes wrong when assessment is driven primarily by compliance. Janio describes a familiar pattern, arguing that the assessment cycle often devolves into an administrative obligation, driven more by accreditation requirements than genuine efforts to improve instruction (2025, para. 3). Faculty collect artifacts, complete forms, and attend meetings, then watch results dissolve into institutional memory with little evidence that teaching conditions changed. When that happens, assessment becomes the opposite of improvement. It becomes a drain on trust. Faculty learn that time invested in assessment does not return to the classroom in the form of clearer curriculum, stronger supports, or improved learning outcomes (Janio, 2025).

The goal is not to create more data. The goal is to create shared learning. In practice, that begins with outcomes written in plain language and connected to what students actually do in

courses. It continues with course embedded evidence that faculty can interpret together. Zubrow's study offers a clear example of why embedded work matters. When assessment felt extraneous, both students and faculty dismissed it. When assessment evolved into a course embedded in common assignments, completion improved, conversations deepened, and faculty revised instruction in visible ways (Zubrow, 2012). This point is especially important for community colleges serving students with complex lives. Students are more likely to engage in assessment tasks when those tasks are clearly part of course learning and carry instructional value.

Transparency, however, is not only for students. It is also for faculty. Carney and Gorski state that just as students need transparency of outcomes and expectations to have an effective and equitable learning experience, faculty need transparency to have an effective and equitable opportunity to teach students well (2019, para. 20). This challenges institutions that assume faculty can succeed without clear structures, especially adjunct faculty who often receive fragmented communication and limited onboarding. If assessment is meant to improve learning, faculty must have equitable access to information, tools, and time that make improvement possible.

Data literacy becomes the bridge between evidence and action when it is treated as shared capacity rather than specialized expertise. Petrov and Sirois describe colleges investing in dashboards, institutional research staffing, and training so that data could be used across teams (2024). One staff member captured the logic simply, stating that if you do not know what is going on, you are not going to be able to do anything about it (Petrov & Sirois, 2024, p. 10). This statement is about visibility, not surveillance. It names a basic requirement for equity work, which is making patterns visible enough to respond with intention rather than guesswork.

Data in community colleges informs far more than assessment reports or accreditation submissions. It shapes everyday decisions about scheduling, staffing, course modality, advising capacity, and resource allocation. Enrollment trends guide which sections are offered and when. Retention data reveal where students are most likely to stop out and where intervention may matter most. Course completion patterns help departments identify gateway courses that require additional instructional support or redesigned curriculum. Student success indicators, including persistence, credit accumulation, and program completion, allow colleges to see whether institutional structures are helping students move forward or quietly creating friction. In this sense, data functions as institutional infrastructure, supporting decision making across instructional, student services, and administrative units, even when it is not labeled as assessment.

Much of the data that informs improvement already exists throughout the college, often outside formal assessment processes. Enrollment management offices track application, registration, and yield patterns. Advising systems capture appointment frequency, referral types, and follow-up outcomes. Learning management systems record student engagement with assignments, feedback, and course materials. Tutoring centers track utilization, subject demand, and timing of visits. Early alert systems document points of academic concern long before grades are final. When these sources remain siloed, they tell fragmented stories. When they are viewed together, they create a fuller picture of how students experience the institution and where support structures align or break down. Assessment becomes more meaningful when it draws from this broader ecosystem of evidence rather than relying only on isolated measures of learning.

One reason assessment and data work provoke anxiety is that they are often associated with numbers, rankings, and judgment. Faculty frequently hear the word assessment and imagine

statistics rather than students. Yet data in community colleges tell stories before they produce metrics. They reveal patterns of persistence and struggle, moments where students succeed despite obstacles, and places where small structural changes make a measurable difference. Data does not replace professional judgment. They give it context and direction. When interpreted collaboratively, data become a map rather than a verdict, showing where conditions are supporting learning and where redesign may be needed. Framed this way, assessment is not something to fear. It is one of the most powerful tools colleges have for making success visible and directing improvement toward places where it can matter most.

Visibility carries risk when data is used without care. Disaggregated data can illuminate inequities, but it can also reinforce deficit narratives about students. The difference lies in interpretation. In an equity-minded assessment culture, gaps are treated as evidence of structural conditions rather than student capacity. This stance must be taught and practiced. It also explains why democratizing assessment matters. When adjunct faculty are included in interpretation, institutions gain contextual knowledge about student experiences and course conditions. Adjunct instructors often identify barriers earlier because they hear why students missed assignments, why materials were inaccessible, or why policies created friction.

Disaggregated data refers to examining patterns by student characteristics rather than relying on aggregate averages that can mask inequities. Instead of looking only at overall course success or retention rates, colleges examine outcomes by race and ethnicity, enrollment status, modality, first generation status, income indicators, or caregiving responsibilities. For example, a gateway math course may show acceptable overall pass rates while disaggregated results reveal that part time students or students enrolled in evening sections are far less likely to complete the course. Similarly, retention data may appear stable until disaggregation shows lower persistence

among students who are placed into developmental coursework or who enroll fully online. By making these patterns visible, disaggregated data help institutions identify where structural conditions, such as scheduling, placement practices, or access to supports, may be creating uneven outcomes. Used thoughtfully, disaggregation shifts attention away from student deficits and toward institutional practices that can be examined and changed.

Janio identifies an additional risk. When institutions emphasize outcomes and metrics without meaningful participation, faculty experience data as overload, and overload becomes disengagement (Janio, 2025). This dynamic is not solved by asking people to care more. It is addressed by making the work smaller, clearer, and more connected to decisions faculty control. Departments do not need every possible metric. They need the next useful piece of evidence paired with time to interpret it and one change to test. Data literacy in this sense is not technical skill. It is the ability to ask a focused question, locate relevant data, interpret it with humility, and decide what to try next.

Student voice also matters. Janio argues that students are often treated as passive subjects rather than active partners, reinforcing institutional blind spots (2025). For community colleges, student voice is a practical resource. Students can identify unclear instructions, inaccessible supports, and feedback that helped revision. Zubrow describes how faculty action research led to the conclusion that rubrics are more effective when students understand and help interpret performance criteria (2012). Students, like adjunct faculty, can be positioned as knowledgeable partners who reveal what institutions might otherwise miss.

Student voice functions as a form of qualitative data that deepens and contextualizes quantitative findings. Surveys, focus groups, course feedback, and informal reflections provide insight into how students interpret expectations, navigate institutional processes, and experience

classroom climate. These forms of evidence capture dimensions of learning and belonging that numerical indicators alone cannot fully represent. While metrics may show where persistence declines or outcomes diverge, they do not explain how students make sense of assignments, policies, or instructional cues. Student perspectives therefore offer critical interpretive context, helping faculty and staff understand how institutional practices are experienced rather than how they are intended.

When faculty listen systematically to student perspectives, they gain access to information that is often invisible in aggregate data, including confusion about assignment expectations, perceptions of belonging or exclusion, and barriers created by institutional language or procedures. This information is especially important in community colleges, where students often navigate complex schedules, multiple roles, and unfamiliar academic norms. Treating student voice as evidence rather than anecdote strengthens assessment by grounding improvement efforts in lived experience rather than assumption. In this way, qualitative data does not compete with quantitative analysis but complements it, ensuring that decisions about change are informed by both patterns and the human experiences those patterns represent.

A persuasive assessment culture depends on how questions are framed. Instead of asking whether students met outcomes in the abstract, faculty can ask where the curriculum supported learning and where it created barriers. Instead of asking why a group underperformed, faculty can ask what conditions shaped performance, including modality, scheduling, access to supports, and clarity of expectations. These questions align with applied equity focused data work described by Petrov and Sirois (2024) and the reflective approach documented by Zubrow (2012).

Community colleges serve transfer and career pathways, therefore assessment must connect to learning beyond a single course. This does not reduce education to employment metrics. It recognizes that mobility depends on skill development and navigational clarity. Data systems can reveal where pathways stall and where supports are underused. Petrov and Sirois describe high awareness of resources paired with low use (2024). Assessment confined to classrooms misses these patterns. Assessment connected to services helps departments coordinate with advising and support units so institutions respond as systems.

Assessment also intersects with persistence constraints. Petrov and Sirois describe data gaps for noncredit programs, part time students, and caregivers, noting that missing data obscure experiences of students facing the greatest barriers (2024). This reminds institutions that equity is shaped by what is measured. When certain students are invisible in data, improvement efforts risk serving only those easiest to see. Democratized assessment cannot solve all gaps, but it can reduce harm by pairing quantitative patterns with qualitative insight from faculty and students.

Assessment becomes more persuasive when connected to professional development designed for adjunct realities. In Zubrow's case, assessment gained traction because it was tied to faculty development that created a community among dispersed part time instructors (2012). Community is a condition for sustained improvement because isolation limits shared standards and practice. Carney and Gorski similarly describe how collaborative inquiry reduced isolation and increased engagement with assessment (2019). When development centers on student work, learning transfers directly to teaching.

Professional development is strongest when structured around small cycles that produce visible change. A cycle can begin with one shared outcome, one embedded assignment, and one scoring session. Faculty examine samples, identify patterns, and choose one change to test. The

aim is not redesign but routine. Zubrow shows how common assignments evolved into multi draft work that strengthened evidence of growth and teaching design (2012).

Small cycles protect faculty from initiative fatigue. Janio's critique suggests disengagement grows when demands accumulate without payoff (2025). Trust builds when colleges focus on one change that matters, often in gateway courses shaping persistence. Departments can complete one cycle, share learning, and invite adaptation. Improvement spreads through borrowing rather than mandate.

Closing the loop requires more than change. It requires checking whether change improves learning. Janio warns that many institutions fail to evaluate whether instructional changes actually improve learning (2025, para. 13). When faculty see changes tested and revisited, assessment becomes institutional learning rather than performance.

Feasible loop closure matters in community colleges. Expectations should emphasize small repeatable cycles rather than lengthy reports. Departments might complete one cycle per term and share a short narrative describing what was measured, what was tried, and what happened. Zubrow describes how virtual forums supported distributed discussion across campuses (2012).

Language also matters. Zubrow notes that assessment language can alienate faculty who see teaching as relational and complex (2012). When assessment is described through managerial or technical terms, it can obscure the intellectual and reflective work faculty already do, making participation feel disconnected from professional identity. Framed as inquiry, assessment invites participation. In Zubrow's case, an internal letter emphasized that faculty ownership made assessment real and meaningful (2012, p. 86). Ownership distinguishes compliance from professional practice.

Narrative plays an important role in reducing fear and restoring trust in assessment work. Numbers alone can feel abstract and depersonalized, especially when faculty are uncertain how results will be used. Data tells the story of the college. Stories of change reintroduce context by showing how evidence led to a specific instructional decision and what happened next. Narratives allow faculty to acknowledge uncertainty, describe challenges, and name partial successes without framing assessment as success or failure. Over time, shared stories help institutions build collective memory, making improvement visible and cumulative rather than episodic. In this way, narrative does not replace data. It humanizes it and makes assessment feel like a shared professional practice rather than an external demand.

Ownership reshapes equity work. When data are centralized, equity becomes specialist labor. Petrov and Sirois describe efforts to distribute data literacy across teams (2024). Equity lives in courses, advising, scheduling, and tutoring. Departments that examine disaggregated patterns are more likely to identify early friction points in gateway courses.

In practice, this work becomes visible when departments use disaggregated evidence to ask concrete questions about course design, instructional norms, and student access to supports. Faculty may notice that students in evening sections are less likely to complete key assignments and connect that pattern to advising availability or support service hours. Advising teams may see differential persistence tied to course placement or onboarding processes and work with faculty to clarify expectations earlier in the term. Tutoring centers may identify uneven use across programs and collaborate with instructors to embed referrals into coursework. When equity is approached through shared interpretation and coordinated response, responsibility shifts from isolated offices to the everyday decisions that shape how students experience learning and support across the institution.

A persuasive assessment culture rests on shared stances. Assessment is professional learning. Data reveal patterns rather than assign blame. Equity gaps indicate conditions that can change. Adjunct faculty are full participants whose classroom knowledge is essential. Together, the literature shows assessment becomes useful when owned by educators and connected to action.

Assessment does not occur in isolation from accreditation. Regional frameworks shape expectations, particularly in NECHE and MSCHE regions. Although data collection and assessment are required components of accreditation, they cannot be meaningfully assembled in the months preceding an accreditation visit. Evidence of learning, improvement, and effectiveness must be generated over time through regular instructional and institutional practice rather than produced in response to an external deadline. These practices are not analogous to last-minute preparation for an audience, but to the ongoing maintenance of institutional habits that reflect mission and purpose. A sustained culture of assessment therefore serves the college well beyond accreditation cycles by strengthening decision making, supporting equity work, and ensuring that improvement efforts are continuous rather than episodic.

Accreditation language often appears technical or bureaucratic, which can obscure its underlying focus on institutional learning. Terms such as effectiveness, evaluation, and systematic assessment are frequently interpreted as compliance requirements rather than as prompts for reflection. In practice, accreditation standards ask institutions to demonstrate that they understand how students are learning, where barriers exist, and how evidence informs improvement.

When colleges approach accreditation as an opportunity to examine coherence across courses, programs, and support services, assessment shifts from documentation to inquiry. Fear

tends to emerge when standards are treated as external judgment rather than as frameworks that legitimize sustained attention to teaching and learning. Leaning in to this work reveals its importance and assuages fear.

NECHE situates assessment within mission driven institutional effectiveness, emphasizing systematic use of results for improvement (NECHE, 2021). Within this framework, assessment is intended to demonstrate institutional coherence by showing how evidence from learning, programs, and services informs decision making over time. MSCHE similarly requires evidence-based assessment used across courses, programs, and planning, linking learning to persistence and completion (MSCHE, 2023). Together, these standards position assessment not as a technical exercise but as a mechanism for understanding whether institutional structures are supporting student success and advancing stated educational purposes.

For community colleges, accreditation both constrains and enables assessment. Timelines can narrow attention toward compliance, yet standards articulate a broader vision supporting participatory, integrated assessment. When interpreted expansively, accreditation legitimizes assessment as shared responsibility rather than administrative task.

Assessment in community colleges becomes meaningful when understood as institutional learning rather than technical obligation. Practices grounded in mission, interpreted collaboratively, and linked to student experience create conditions for equitable and sustainable improvement. This work becomes an ongoing conversation about educational purposes rather than a report.

The toolkit in the appendices extends this argument. It translates principles from this chapter into adaptable structures supporting inquiry, reflection, and action across contexts. Emphasizing course embedded evidence, faculty led interpretation, and connections to student

success indicators, the toolkit addresses constraints of time, adjunct labor, and accreditation pressure. It offers mechanisms for improvement that remain grounded in classrooms and professional knowledge, inviting continuation of the assessment work outlined here.

Key Takeaways

Chapter 11, Movement IV: Building Institutional Coherence and Sustainable Change

When student work and disaggregated data are examined with care, the patterns that emerge reveal not just where learning falters, but where institutional assumptions begin to crumble. Adjuncts are most consistently closest to this evidence, reading it through lived experience, discipline knowledge, and classroom realities, so their insight becomes indispensable, positioning them as essential change agents in any honest effort to improve learning and equity.

CHAPTER TWELVE: CONCLUSION:

ELEVATING EVERY VOICE: REBUILDING CULTURE, POLICY, AND PRACTICE AROUND STUDENT AND FACULTY EXPERIENCE

This dissertation ends where it began, in the lived reality of a two-year college classroom. Students arrive with work schedules, family obligations, uneven prior schooling, language histories, and disability access needs that shape what they can do on any given day. Instructors translate institutional expectations into practices that students can follow, and those practices determine whether a course feels like a pathway or a gate. Support either appears inside the course in clear routines or it remains scattered across offices and websites that students may never reach. The everyday design of teaching becomes the everyday experience of college.

In the early sections of this inquiry, community colleges emerge as institutions built to expand opportunity and absorb social change. Open admission creates entry, yet entry does not automatically create traction. Funding constraints, policy pressures, and fluctuating enrollments shape staffing choices that move quickly and quietly into the classroom. Those choices determine who teaches foundational courses and who has time and access to participate in shaping them. When stability is thin, continuity becomes hard to sustain and students feel that instability as changing expectations and limited connection. A mission that promises access requires structures that make success possible.

From there, we look toward language and see how academic norms operate as invisible curriculum across programs. Communication sits inside every discipline in lab reports, clinical notes, presentations, emails, and documentation required for work. Instruction improves when communication is treated as purposeful practice with audience, context, and consequences rather

than as a set of fixed rules. Critical attention to language makes room for multilingual resources while still teaching the conventions students need to enter academic and professional discourse. Students gain access to the discourse of fields when expectations are explicit and modeled. A classroom becomes more equitable when language is taught as a tool that can be chosen and adapted.

Exploring the daily conditions of adjunct work demonstrates the ways those conditions shape identity and well-being. Late course assignments compress preparation time and push planning into unpaid hours. Limited onboarding forces instructors to build their own maps of the institution while they are already teaching. Fragmented communication overwhelms instructors with information that is not organized around what they need for students that week. Exclusion from meetings and committees separates instructors from the decisions that shape their own courses. Students experience the results as uneven support and uneven access to faculty presence.

Leadership then becomes visible as a set of routines rather than a set of titles. A decision made in a meeting matters only when it becomes possible to act on it in classrooms across terms. Participation becomes real when people who teach the courses have a feasible way to contribute, including an asynchronous path when meeting times exclude them. Authority becomes real when time and compensation match the work of planning, revising, and assessing. Information becomes usable when it is delivered in predictable formats that instructors can find quickly. A college shows what it values by who can act after the meeting ends.

Collaboration and mentoring shift this leadership into shared practice. Faculty become less isolated when they have predictable spaces to compare assignments, align language, and interpret student work together. Students experience fewer hidden rules when course

expectations share common vocabulary across sections and modalities. Planning becomes more sustainable when departments preserve materials that can be adapted rather than reinvented each term. Mentoring makes the institution legible for new instructors and it makes student support pathways easier to use. Community grows when teaching stops being private improvisation and becomes shared work.

Professional development and evaluation appear next as parts of instructional infrastructure rather than occasional events. Training becomes consequential when it produces deliverables instructors can use immediately and when follow up supports revision after real classroom use. Evaluation supports growth when feedback is constructive, transparent, and connected to teaching goals rather than tied to disposability. Improvement becomes more likely when professional learning is paid, scheduled with adjunct availability in mind, and offered in flexible formats. A college strengthens teaching when it treats learning for faculty as part of work rather than extra labor. Faculty confidence grows when development is connected to evidence and supported over time.

The pedagogical chapters make inclusive design concrete through multilingual approaches, trauma informed routines, scaffolding, and Universal Design for Learning. These areas are where professional development must start. Predictable structures reduce cognitive load and allow students to focus on learning rather than guessing. Choice in pathways protects dignity while keeping outcomes rigorous. Scaffolds make complex tasks possible without simplifying the thinking required. Metacognitive routines teach students how to plan, monitor, and revise their own work so the strategy can transfer to other courses. Students carry these skills into future classrooms and into workplaces that reward self management and clear communication.

Inclusive practice also becomes a cross disciplinary commitment when students learn how to communicate for real audiences. A student who can explain a process, justify a choice, revise after feedback, and collaborate with peers is building competence that travels. A multilingual student who can use their full repertoire to develop ideas and then shape those ideas for a professional context gains both access and agency. A student with limited time who can break work into steps and recover after disruption gains persistence tools that matter beyond one semester. These skills do not belong to one department. They belong to the institution when the institution designs for them.

Vocational alignment strengthens this work by connecting coursework to real decisions students must make about time, money, and opportunity. Courses can ask students to research pathways, credentials, and wages while also practicing critical thinking, communication, and evaluation of sources. Applied assignments can mirror workplace genres without abandoning academic standards. Students benefit when they can see how a task maps onto a professional expectation and when they can articulate that connection in writing or speech. Learning becomes more durable when it is connected to purpose that students can name. Equity improves when relevance is designed rather than assumed.

Assessment becomes most useful when it functions as a shared inquiry. Faculty interpret evidence together and the conversation stays grounded in student work rather than abstract impressions. Patterns become visible across sections when adjunct taught courses are included in the evidence set and when adjunct instructors are present in the interpretation. Actions become real when the group documents what it will change, who will do it, and when it will be reviewed. Trust grows when assessment is connected to improvement rather than punishment. A culture of assessment emerges when the loop closes and results are shared back with the people who teach.

The toolkit offered with this dissertation is designed to make these moves feasible in real schedules and real budgets. It provides templates, agendas, and facilitation guides that can be used in a single meeting or scaled across a department. It prompts colleges to map where decisions are made and to notice who is missing from those spaces. It supports micro leadership roles that are bounded and compensated so participation does not depend on unpaid volunteerism. It makes documentation part of the work so learning does not disappear at the end of the term. The toolkit functions as a starting structure that helps practice travel.

Appendix A, Suggested Professional Development Opportunities for Adjunct Faculty, supports institutions that want to employ inclusive pedagogy across disciplines. The menu is designed for flexible use so departments can choose learning areas that match current needs and schedules. Professional development can be structured as short paid cycles that produce concrete deliverables such as clearer prompts, shared rubrics, or feedback language that students understand. Follow up sessions can invite instructors to bring student work and revise tools based on what happened in class. That approach builds capacity without requiring faculty to donate time to participate.

Appendix B, Collaboration Routines and Shared Teaching Deliverables, supports a shared repository that reduces isolation and preserves instructional learning. A repository can live in a learning management system space that all instructors can access, including adjuncts who teach evenings and weekends. The repository can hold current course materials, templates, student support referral scripts, and short examples of effective practice across disciplines. Contribution routines can rotate so the work is shared and visible, and summaries can be posted after meetings so instructors who could not attend can still act. A repository turns scattered knowledge into institutional memory.

Appendix C, Evidence and Reflection Tools for Professional Learning Cycles, supports improvement that continues past one semester. A short reflection tool can capture what was tried, what students produced, what questions repeated, and what will change next time. A shared scoring protocol can support consistency and equity when multiple sections teach the same outcomes. A brief memo format can carry community learning into curriculum or assessment decisions without requiring long reports. These tools are launching points, and local adaptation is expected and encouraged. The goal is momentum that lasts, not a rigid program.

The next steps can be small and still be consequential. A college can begin by funding one paid professional learning cycle on multilingual practice, trauma-informed routines, scaffolding, or Universal Design for Learning and by requiring a usable deliverable at the end. A department can create one compensated adjunct seat on a committee where curriculum or assessment decisions are made and can rotate facilitation roles so leadership is shared. A team can build one repository space and populate it with the materials instructors and students reach for most often, then keep it current through a simple stewardship routine. A meeting can include an asynchronous input window and a published summary so participation does not depend on presence. Repetition turns these small moves into culture.

Two-year colleges have always been a support to students moving them closer to their educational and career goals. A college becomes a community when instructors are treated as colleagues with voice and when students encounter systems designed for real lives. Hope grows when structures invite participation, compensate labor, and make learning visible across roles. The work is not quick, yet it is workable when it is shared and when it begins with the next practical step. The practices in this dissertation are offered in that spirit, as invitations that can be

adapted and strengthened over time. Two-year colleges can step into these practices and step into community, and students will feel the difference in the next class meeting.

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APPENDIX A

PD Opportunities Aligned with Toolkit Sections

Dissertation Chapter	PD Focus / Opportunity	Toolkit Alignment
Ch. 1: History, Demographics, & Two-Year Colleges	Know Your Institution data walk on enrollment, demographics, completion, course success, and staffing; cross-rank groups identify equity gaps and labor patterns.	§5 Culture of Assessment (data as shared inquiry); §1 Governance & Leadership (transparent, data-informed decisions).
Ch. 2: Linguistic Justice & Equity	Critical Language Awareness workshop revising syllabi and assignments to remove deficit/monolingual language while maintaining rigor.	§3 Curriculum Design for Real Lives; §4 Reaching All Learners (multilingual routines, translanguaging).
Ch. 3: Adjunct Identity, Barriers, & Well-Being	Adjunct story circles with structured prompts, listening rounds, and collective identification of barriers to co-design supports.	§2 Micro-Leadership & Communities of Practice; §1 Governance & Leadership (structural barriers as data).
Ch. 4: Distributed Leadership & Empowerment	Governance audit and Adjunct Governance Rep training: map committees, identify gaps in voice/vote/compensation, practice agenda reading and reporting back.	§1 Governance & Leadership (governance mapping, role design); distributed leadership framework.
Ch. 5: Collaboration, Mentoring, & Community	Adjunct-facilitated teaching circles and mentoring pairs with shared norms, simple protocols, and rotating leadership.	§2 Micro-Leadership & Communities of Practice (teaching circles, mentoring).
Ch. 6: PD & Evaluation Paradigms	PD by Us, for Us redesign: prototype flexible, compensated PD (micro-sessions, embedded meetings, async modules) and formative evaluation routines.	§2 Micro-Leadership & Communities of Practice; §4 Reaching All Learners (practice-anchored PD).
Ch. 7: Multilingual & Trauma-Informed Pedagogy	Practice lab rehearsing trauma-informed routines, flexible participation, and translanguaging; adapt one routine to a gateway course.	§4 Reaching All Learners (multilingual, trauma-informed tools).

Ch. 8: Inclusive & Differentiated Instruction	UDL lesson-planning lab redesigning a week of instruction with peer feedback and ready-to-use plans.	§4 Reaching All Learners (UDL planner, inclusive routines).
Ch. 9: Scaffolding & Metacognition	Scaffolding sprint to deconstruct complex assignments, add stepwise supports, and embed transferable metacognitive check-ins.	§3 Curriculum Design for Real Lives; §4 Reaching All Learners.
Ch. 10: Vocational Alignment & Pathways	Employer-connected assignment design and pathway mapping linking courses to credentials, transfer, and workforce outcomes.	§3 Curriculum Design for Real Lives; §4 Reaching All Learners (career-relevant engagement).
Ch. 11: Assessment & Continuous Improvement	Shared-scoring day and adjunct-led mini inquiry cycle using scoring protocols and action-planning tools.	§5 Culture of Assessment (inclusive cycles; assessment as inquiry).
Conclusion: Rebuilding Culture & Policy	Cross-rank culture audit and action-planning retreat to set 1–2 structural shifts annually across governance, PD, and evaluation.	§1 Governance & Leadership; §2 Micro-Leadership & Communities of Practice.

These professional development opportunities are designed as practical on-ramps into the larger change process outlined in the toolkit (Appendix B), especially the goals summarized in the timeline above. Rather than one-off workshops, they function as recurring structures, such as data walks, teaching circles, shared-scoring days, and governance audits. These activities will gradually build more inclusive governance, stronger communities of practice, equity-centered curriculum, and a robust culture of assessment across years one through three.

For adjunct faculty, these offerings create compensated, structured spaces to share expertise, reduce isolation, and step into micro-leadership roles such as teaching-circle facilitator, course lead, or governance representative, directly aligning with the toolkit’s emphasis on

adjunct leadership cohorts and expanded roles over time. For department chairs and academic leaders, the sessions provide ready-made formats to pilot in one or two programs, generating concrete evidence and processes that can later be written into bylaws, handbooks, PD plans, and program review cycles as suggested in the governance, micro-leadership, curriculum design, and assessment sections of the timeline. For senior administration, this menu of PD opportunities offers a clear pathway to move from broad commitments to equity and student success toward measurable institutional shifts, such as formalizing adjunct seats on key committees, funding ongoing communities of practice, and integrating equity-minded design and assessment into standard operating procedures.

Possible Professional Development Opportunities Descriptions

“Know Your Institution” Data Walk (Handout: Chapter One, Pre-Read)

In this 60–90 minute “Know Your Institution” data walk, faculty circulate through visual stations displaying enrollment, demographics, completion, course success, and staffing trends for the college. Mixed-rank groups annotate what they notice on posters or shared documents, highlighting equity gaps and patterns in how contingent and full-time labor are distributed across programs. A brief debrief invites participants to name 1–2 questions or action ideas emerging from the data, modeling a culture where information is shared, interrogated, and used collectively rather than held by a few decision-makers.

Critical Language Awareness Workshop (Handout: Chapter Two, Pre-Read)

This 2-hour Critical Language Awareness workshop asks participants to bring one syllabus and a major assignment from a current course. After a short framing on linguistic justice and multilingual equity, instructors work in pairs or trios to identify deficit language, monolingual assumptions, and grading policies that may penalize multilingual and first-generation students,

using short prompts and checklists. Faculty then revise their materials on the spot, sharing before-and-after examples that demonstrate how shifting language and criteria can validate students' linguistic resources while maintaining rigor.

Adjunct Identity & Well-Being Story Circle (Handout: Chapter Three, Pre-Read)

In this 90-minute story circle, adjunct faculty share short “snapshot” stories in response to prompts about teaching, scheduling, evaluation, and professional identity. Each round focuses on one question, with participants listening without interruption and then reflecting on the themes and emotions that surfaced. The group then names common barriers and brainstorms concrete, department-level supports—such as shared office space, more stable course assignments, or clearer communication channels—that respond directly to what has been voiced.

Governance Audit & Adjunct Representative Training (Handout: Chapter Four, Pre-Read)

This half-day session begins with a structured governance audit where mixed-rank groups map existing committees, identify who currently has voice, vote, and compensation, and note where adjunct participation is missing or informal. Participants use simple tools to capture gaps and possibilities, such as adding adjunct seats to specific committees or creating rotating representative roles. The second segment is a practicum for Adjunct Governance Representatives, who practice reading agendas, prioritizing issues, speaking from shared experiences, and writing short, clear updates for colleagues after each meeting.

Adjunct-Facilitated Teaching Circles (Handout: Chapter Five, Pre-Read)

This offering launches one or more teaching circles focused on a shared course, program, or challenge (for example, a high-enrollment gateway course or multilingual writers' needs). In the initial 60–90 minute meeting, participants co-create norms, select a focus for the semester, and

choose simple protocols (such as lesson-share rounds or student-work consultations) to structure future gatherings. Adjunct facilitators guide scheduling and agendas, ensuring meetings are practical, time-bounded, and oriented toward small changes that can be tested across multiple sections.

“PD by Us, for Us” Redesign Session (Handout: Chapter Six, Pre-Read)

During this design session, adjunct faculty map their current realities around professional development (time constraints, pay, childcare, multiple campuses, and technology access) using quick individual reflections and small-group discussions. Groups then sketch several new PD formats that would actually work in those conditions, such as brief stipended micro-sessions, embedded course-team meetings, or asynchronous modules that can be completed between classes. Participants also outline simple, formative ways to see whether these new formats are useful, such as short feedback forms, follow-up check-ins, or peer-sharing of what was tried.

Multilingual & Trauma-Informed Practice Lab (Handout: Chapter Seven, Pre-Read)

This practice lab focuses on concrete routines rather than long presentations. Instructors rotate through mini-stations where they rehearse trauma-informed openings and closings, flexible participation options, and multilingual supports such as translanguaging prompts, sentence frames, and opportunities for students to draw on home languages. Each participant adapts at least one routine to a specific gateway course they teach, leaving with a written plan and language they can use in the next week of class.

UDL-Aligned Lesson-Planning Lab (Handout: Chapter Eight, Pre-Read)

In this 2-hour lab, faculty bring a week of an existing course calendar and use the “Reaching All Learners” planner to redesign that week around core principles of universal design for learning.

With guided prompts, participants identify where they can add multiple means of representation (e.g., visuals, short readings, mini-lectures), engagement (e.g., low-stakes check-ins, choice), and expression (e.g., varied ways to show understanding). Peers provide feedback on drafts, so each instructor finishes with a complete, UDL-aligned plan ready for immediate implementation.

Scaffolding & Metacognition Sprint (Handout: Chapter Nine, Pre-Read)

This short sprint asks participants to bring one complex assignment, such as a research paper, lab report, or major project, from a course they regularly teach. In a series of timed rounds, faculty break the task into smaller steps, design brief in-class activities to practice each step, and embed metacognitive routines like pre-task planning and post-task reflection. Attention is given to explicit study-skills teaching (for example, how to chunk reading or manage time) so that students in foundational and developmental courses have clearer pathways through demanding work.

Pathway Mapping & Employer-Connected Assignments (Handout: Chapter Ten, Pre-Read)

This working session begins with a simple pathway-mapping activity: participants trace one course's connections to certificates, degrees, transfer pathways, and local or regional employment sectors. With that map visible, faculty redesign a signature assignment so students must connect course content to a real program outcome, credential step, or workplace scenario, potentially drawing on short input from program advisors or employer partners. The session closes with participants sharing how they will introduce the assignment so that students can see the relevance of their learning to future study and work.

Shared-Scoring Day & Mini Inquiry Cycle (Handout: Chapter Eleven, Pre-Read)

In this inclusive shared-scoring day, faculty from different ranks and sections read anonymized samples of student work using a common rubric. Small groups discuss where they agree or differ in scoring, what they notice about student strengths, and where patterns of struggle appear, particularly for first-generation, multilingual, or returning adult students. Each group then drafts a small, testable instructional or curricular change, such as a new pre-writing activity or model text, to try in the next term, along with a simple plan for checking whether it makes a difference.

Cross-Rank Culture Audit & Action Retreat (Handout: Conclusion, Pre-Read)

This retreat convenes adjunct and full-time faculty, staff, and academic leaders to examine campus culture through structured prompts. Using a culture-audit tool, mixed-rank teams review policies, governance structures, professional development practices, and evaluation procedures from the standpoint of both student and faculty experience. Participants generate a short list of concrete commitments, such as revising committee bylaws, stabilizing course assignments, or redesigning PD expectations, along with timelines and responsible parties, so that the retreat leads to visible changes rather than one-time reflection.

Appendix A offers starting points, not prescriptions, and every campus should adapt or replace these tools to fit its own history, structures, and collective bargaining agreements so that changes emerge from shared inquiry rather than from a fixed template. The chapters of this dissertation serve as readings for these professional development opportunities. The purpose of this toolkit is to make it easier to imagine and test concrete moves toward shared governance in which adjunct faculty have real, compensated roles in shaping courses, policies, assessment, and professional learning. This is not to substitute for local negotiation, organizing, or policy work. Departments, unions, and senior leaders are encouraged to treat these tools as drafts to revise together, using

them to surface questions, map current decision paths, and design structures where full-time and part-time faculty participate as co-architects of the institution over time.

APPENDIX B

Online Repository in the LMS

Introduction: Meeting Faculty and Staff Where They Are

Adjunct faculty work without the institutional visibility, physical space, and access to information that full-time colleagues take for granted. This online repository, housed directly in the learning management system (LMS), transforms that reality by creating a comprehensive digital home for all faculty and staff, with intentional design that meets adjuncts where they already work.

The repository consolidates essential information, practical teaching resources, governance materials, professional development archives, and collaborative community spaces into one accessible, searchable location. By embedding these resources in the LMS rather than scattering them across disconnected websites, email threads, and physical offices that adjuncts rarely visit, the repository makes institutional participation genuinely possible for contingent faculty while serving as a valuable hub for all employees.

Aligned with the Adjunct Governance and Teaching Toolkit, this repository is guided by five design principles: accessibility (intuitive navigation, mobile-friendly, available 24/7 in multiple formats), transparency (plain-language explanations of policies and decisions), equity (equal access and clear participation pathways for all employment statuses), sustainability (shared ownership with regular updates and version control), and community (interactive spaces for connection, not just static file storage). The repository is more than a digital filing cabinet. It is a living platform that reduces isolation, increases visibility, and empowers faculty to engage fully in teaching, governance, and institutional life.

Repository Structure and Contents

The repository is organized into ten primary sections, each accessible through a central navigation menu with robust search functionality and intuitive tagging. What follows is an overview of each section, the resources housed there, and what faculty and staff can expect to find when they navigate to that space.

Section 1: Leadership, Administration, Deans, and Chairs

Component	Examples of Resources	Example Deliverables
Senior Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • President's Office contact information and office hours • Vision, mission, and strategic priorities • Presidential updates and campus messages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual "State of the College" message • One-page summary of strategic priorities for adjuncts • Quarterly leadership Q&A recording
Academic Leadership (VPAA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VPAA contact information and academic priorities • Academic calendar and key instructional dates • Academic policy and curriculum updates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Term-by-term academic calendar PDF • Brief video explainer on current academic priorities • FAQ on recent academic policy changes
Student Services Leadership (VPSS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VPSS contact information • Overview of student services • Emergency and crisis response information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick-reference crisis response card • One-page guide to student services for syllabi • Script for referring students to VPSS resources
Deans and Division Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dean and associate dean directories • Divisional priorities and initiatives • Escalation pathways and communication norms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Division-level welcome letter to adjuncts • Divisional org chart • Guide: "When to contact your dean vs. chair"

Department Chairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department directories and chair contacts • Meeting schedules, agendas, and minutes • Decision-making maps and adjunct liaison roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standardized department welcome email template • Visual decision-making map per department • Calendar of department meetings open to adjuncts
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What Faculty and Staff Will Find: Clear, direct pathways to contact institutional leaders at every level; transparent insight into institutional priorities and strategic direction; understanding of when and how key decisions are made; and clarity about whom to approach with specific questions, concerns, or ideas. This section demystifies the organizational chart and makes leadership accessible rather than distant.

Section 2: Employment and Human Resources

Component	Examples of Resources	Example Deliverables
Human Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HR staff directory by function • New adjunct onboarding checklist • Workplace policies and grievance procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Downloadable onboarding checklist for new adjuncts • New-hire orientation slide deck • One-page overview of grievance steps
Payroll and Compensation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay schedules and important dates • Compensation structure and stipends • Timesheet submission instructions and templates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay calendar by semester • Sample completed timesheet • Short video: "How to submit your hours"
Benefits and Leave	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefits eligibility and enrollment periods • Sick leave, personal leave, and family leave descriptions • Links to forms and contacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefits comparison summary for adjuncts • Leave request form with instructions • FAQ on part-time benefits eligibility

Employee Handbook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current handbook with searchable TOC • Adjunct-specific supplement • Plain-language guides and FAQs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Top 10 policies adjuncts should know" handout • One-page summary of evaluation-related policies • Short glossary of key HR terms
Professional Development Funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PD funding eligibility criteria • Application forms and examples of approved uses • Contact for support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PD funding application template • Sample successful PD proposal • Timeline for PD funding cycles

What Faculty and Staff Will Find: Everything needed to understand how to get hired, paid, and supported; clarity about benefits eligibility and how to access them; straightforward explanations of leave policies and workplace protections; templates for submitting timesheets and requesting professional development funds; and direct answers to the employment questions that often go unanswered for part-time faculty.

Section 3: Policies and Procedures

Component	Examples of Resources	Example Deliverables
Academic Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grading, attendance, and academic integrity policies • Withdrawal, incomplete, and appeal processes • Syllabus requirements and templates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syllabus template with required policy language • Quick-guide: "Handling incompletes and withdrawals" • Academic integrity reporting script for faculty
Institutional Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance bylaws and committee structures • Evaluation procedures and observation protocols • Hiring and reappointment guidelines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flowchart of annual evaluation process • Infographic: shared governance at a glance • Checklist for reappointment readiness

Technology and Safety Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acceptable use and data privacy guidelines • FERPA and email policies • Campus safety and emergency procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Do and Don't" sheet for email and LMS use • Emergency response poster for office and LMS • Micro-module on FERPA for instructors
Policy Updates and Notifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy change log with dates and rationale • Comment periods for draft policies • Notifications for changes affecting adjuncts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly "Policy Updates for Instructors" brief • Comment form for draft policy feedback • Summary sheet of major changes each year
Forms and Catalogs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current academic catalog and archives • Registration, add/drop, withdrawal, and incomplete forms • Links to student-facing documentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct-link list to most-used forms • Short guide: "Choosing the right form" • Catalog summary by program area

What Faculty and Staff Will Find: Centralized, searchable access to all policies that shape teaching and working conditions; plain-language explanations that make complex policies understandable; transparency about when and why policies change; opportunities to provide input before new policies are finalized; and confidence that they are working from current, accurate policy information rather than outdated or secondhand interpretations.

Section 4: Student Support Services

Component	Examples of Resources	Example Deliverables
Disability Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact information and office hours • Accommodation process and faculty role • Guides for implementing accommodations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Step-by-step "Faculty Accommodation Checklist" • Sample syllabus accessibility statement • Script for welcoming students to share letters

Academic Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tutoring and writing center hours and locations • Library research and citation support • Academic advising contacts and referral processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-page "How to Refer a Student to Tutoring" guide • Library instruction request form • Short video introducing the writing center
Wellness and Basic Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counseling services and crisis hotlines • Food pantry and emergency aid information • Health services and insurance resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slide for class presentation on basic-needs supports • Wallet-size or digital quick card for emergencies • Sample email to a student about wellness supports
Financial and Conduct Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial aid and scholarship resources • Payment plan and emergency funding information • Student conduct and Title IX reporting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial aid referral script for faculty • Conduct incident reporting checklist • Title IX resource one-pager for instructors
Referral Templates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customizable email templates for academic and wellness referrals • Suggested language for compassionate outreach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Template pack for common referral scenarios • LMS announcement template promoting support services • "If you're worried about a student" decision aid

What Faculty and Staff Will Find: Quick, concrete answers to "Where do I send this student?" for every common need; pre-written referral email templates that save time and ensure students receive accurate information; clear descriptions of what each support service provides and how to access it; guidance on faculty responsibilities (such as implementing accommodations); and confidence that they can connect struggling students to help without needing to navigate complex systems themselves.

Section 5: Teaching Materials and Best Practices

Component	Examples of Resources	Example Deliverables
Best Practices Library	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive syllabus design guides • Assignment scaffolding tools • Multilingual, trauma-informed, and UDL strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two-page "Inclusive Syllabus Checklist" • Scaffolded assignment planning worksheet • UDL-aligned lesson planning template
Exemplar Course Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fully designed course shells for gateway courses • Sample assignments with rubrics • Discussion protocols for multiple modalities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importable LMS course shells for composition or gateway math • Model assignment sequence for a 15-week course • Pack of discussion prompts and protocol instructions
Feedback and Assessment Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comment banks and feedback templates • Single-point and analytic rubrics • Self- and peer-assessment tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Downloadable comment bank for writing assignments • Single-point rubric template file • Student self-reflection form for major projects
Classroom Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community-building and icebreaker activities • Retrieval practice and collaborative tasks • Metacognitive reflection activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity bank organized by week or course stage • "First-Day and Last-Day Activities" toolkit • Reflection prompts bank for quick writes
Contribution and Attribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submission form for faculty materials • Peer review criteria • Recognition for contributors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributor profile page for adjunct faculty • "Featured Resource of the Month" spotlight • Simple rubric for reviewing shared materials

What Faculty and Staff Will Find: Ready-to-adapt materials that save preparation time while supporting high-quality, inclusive teaching; concrete examples of equity-minded practices rather than abstract principles; assignments and activities organized by the specific teaching challenges they address; peer-created resources that reflect real community college contexts; and practical guidance grounded in what actually works with multilingual, first-generation, and underrepresented student populations.

Section 6: Institutional Subscriptions and Professional Development

Component	Examples of Resources	Example Deliverables
Licensed Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Library databases and streaming platforms • Social annotation and collaboration tools • Accessibility and captioning tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Where to Find Articles and Media" guide for faculty • Tool comparison sheet (features, use cases) • Embedding instructions with screenshots for LMS
PD Calendar and Registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual professional development calendar • Session descriptions and registration links • Stipend and recognition information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Printable semester PD calendar • Registration link hub page • "Build Your PD Pathway" planning worksheet
Archived PD Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop and teaching circle recordings • Slide decks, handouts, and templates • Follow-up reading lists and tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-demand "PD Library" index page • Recommended PD playlists by theme • Implementation toolkit for a flagship workshop
Micro-Credentials and Certificates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital badges and certificate pathways • Portfolio requirements and documentation templates • Evaluation and advancement connections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Badge and certificate pathway map • Portfolio checklist for documenting PD impact • Sample completed PD portfolio excerpts

Impact and Implementation Stories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty examples of applied PD • Short written or video reflections • Highlights of adjunct-led innovations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Stories from Our Classrooms" video playlist • One-page case studies featuring adjunct-led changes • Template for submitting an implementation story
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What Faculty and Staff Will Find: Discovery of valuable resources the institution already pays for but that often go unused due to lack of awareness; practical guidance on how to integrate databases, videos, and tools into courses; access to professional development sessions they missed, with full materials available for asynchronous learning; evidence of their professional growth through documented participation and earned credentials; and inspiration from colleagues' teaching innovations and classroom experiments.

Section 7: Governance and Committees

Component	Examples of Resources	Example Deliverables
Committee Directory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of standing committees and charges • Membership rosters with status • Identification of committees with adjunct seats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-page "Committees You Can Join" handout • Visual map of governance bodies • Directory with contact info for committee chairs
Agendas and Minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agendas posted in advance • Minutes posted promptly • Decision summaries in plain language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Searchable archive of agendas and minutes • Snapshot summaries by semester • "What This Decision Means for Adjuncts" briefs
Participation Pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructions on how to join committees • Term lengths and compensation details 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Step-by-step "How to Serve on a Committee" guide • Application or interest form template

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations for meeting participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orientation slides for new committee members
Report-Out Templates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standardized recap template for representatives • Guidance on documenting decisions and impacts • Suggested language for communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fillable report-out form for adjunct reps • Sample email summarizing a committee meeting • Checklist for sharing back with departments
Feedback and Comment Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forms for input on governance issues • Open comment periods for draft policies • Town hall information and contacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online feedback form embedded in the LMS • Annual governance feedback survey • Town hall schedule and discussion guide

What Faculty and Staff Will Find: Transparency about where and how institutional decisions are actually made; clear understanding of which committees have adjunct representation and how to get involved; ability to track committee work and stay informed about emerging policies and initiatives; multiple pathways for providing input even without formal committee membership; and demystification of governance structures that often seem opaque or inaccessible to part-time faculty.

Section 8: Communications Hub

Component	Examples of Resources	Example Deliverables
Newsletters and Digests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekly digest of announcements and deadlines • Teaching and learning newsletter • Adjunct spotlight features 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "This Week at a Glance" email template • Standard newsletter layout for teaching & learning • Spotlight profile template for adjuncts

Announcements and Alerts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urgent campus alerts and closures • Policy change notifications • Celebration and recognition messages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alert banner design for the LMS home page • Policy-change announcement script • Recognition template for awards and publications
Academic Calendar and Key Dates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Downloadable calendar • Grade submission and census dates • PD events and major campus gatherings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Color-coded digital calendar file • "Key Dates for Instructors" one-pager • Add-to-calendar links embedded in announcements
Archives and Search	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Searchable archive of past communications • Filtering by topic, date, and audience • Links to related resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organized archive index with tags • Quick "How to Search Archives" guide • Set of saved searches (e.g., "Adjunct Opportunities")
Communication Preferences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Options for digest frequency • Channel choices (email, LMS, text) • Topic-based opt-in lists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preference management page in the LMS • Short explainer on customizing notifications • Self-serve subscription/unsubscription forms

What Faculty and Staff Will Find: One reliable place to check for all current announcements and updates rather than searching through scattered emails; archived newsletters searchable by date, topic, and keyword; a complete academic calendar they can download or subscribe to digitally; control over communication frequency and format to prevent inbox overload; regular recognition of adjunct contributions that makes contingent faculty visible and valued; and confidence that they are not missing critical information due to inconsistent communication channels.

Section 9: Interactive Collaboration and Mentoring Spaces

Component	Examples of Resources	Example Deliverables
Discussion Boards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching strategies and student support forums • Technology and accessibility discussions • Adjunct lounge and discipline-specific boards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion board norms and starter prompts • Monthly "Question of the Month" for sharing practice • Highlight reel of notable threads
Communities of Practice (CoPs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spaces for CoPs aligned with toolkit themes • Membership lists and meeting schedules • Shared documents and resource libraries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CoP charter template • CoP meeting agenda and notes template • "How to Start a Community of Practice" guide
Shared Resource Libraries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource collections by discipline and level • Filters by pedagogy and assessment type • Popular and highly rated materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curated "starter packs" by course type • Tagging schema guide for contributors • Featured resource carousel on the LMS home page
Mentoring Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matching system for mentors and mentees • Virtual office hours hosted by experienced faculty • Guides and prompts for mentoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring agreement template • Conversation starter deck for mentor–mentee pairs • Calendar of open mentoring office hours
Feedback and Continuous Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repository feedback form • Pulse surveys and annual reviews • Adjunct advisory group updates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quarterly "You Asked, We Did" report • Short survey for new users after first login • Annual repository improvement plan summary

What Faculty and Staff Will Find: Active spaces for asking teaching questions, troubleshooting challenges, and sharing successful strategies with colleagues; opportunities to join or form communities of practice around shared interests or teaching contexts; mentoring

relationships that reduce isolation and provide guidance for navigating institutional systems; ability to contribute their own effective practices and receive recognition for that contribution; and genuine community that counters the isolation many adjuncts experience by working across multiple institutions or teaching only evening courses.

Section 10: Technology, LMS Training, and AI Guidance

Component	Examples of Resources	Example Deliverables
Technology and Helpdesk Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IT helpdesk contact information and hours • Ticketing system instructions • Device, account, and password support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "How to Get Tech Help" quick card • Ticket submission walkthrough with screenshots • FAQ on common login and access issues
LMS Training and Microlearning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short video tutorials on core LMS features • Downloadable quick-start guides • Sample course shell tours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10-minute "Getting Started in the LMS" module • Printable LMS setup checklist for new courses • Model LMS course home page template
Instructional Technology Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentation for supported tools • Access and login instructions • Pedagogical use cases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tool-by-tool "Why/When to Use" guide • Side-by-side comparison chart for key tools • Assignment examples using each tool
Accessibility and Universal Design Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on accessibility checkers • Guidance on accessible documents and media • Links to UDL-aligned technology resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick-reference accessibility checklist • Captioning and alt-text how-to guide • Mini-module on UDL with tech examples
AI Policy and Pedagogical Guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional AI policy summaries • Sample syllabus language on AI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syllabus insert on AI use and boundaries • Faculty guide: "Designing Assignments in the Age of AI"

	• Assignment design ideas for AI-rich contexts	• Reflection prompts for students on AI and learning
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What Faculty and Staff Will Find: Straightforward answers to technology questions without needing to navigate multiple support channels; just-in-time training on LMS features exactly when they need to use them; discovery of instructional technology tools the institution supports and practical examples of how to use them; clear, evolving guidance on how to approach AI in teaching (neither banning it nor ignoring it, but integrating it responsibly); sample language and strategies they can implement immediately in their courses; and confidence that they have institutional support for navigating rapidly changing technology landscapes.

Implementation and Sustainability

The repository's success depends on thoughtful implementation and long-term sustainability structures. Implementation proceeds through phased development beginning with a cross-role design team of 3-5 adjuncts, 2 full-time faculty, 1 instructional designer, 1 IT staff member, and 1 administrator who conduct needs assessment, audit existing resources, and build the initial repository shell. Sections are populated systematically with clear protocols established for who updates what and how often. The repository launches first with new adjunct orientation to build awareness from the start.

Sustainability is maintained through clearly assigned section stewards (faculty and staff with responsibility and modest stipends or workload credit for keeping their sections current), regular content review cycles (quarterly for time-sensitive information, annually for stable resources), integration into routine institutional processes (onboarding, professional development, governance participation, program review), and ongoing input from the rotating

adjunct advisory group that ensures the repository continues meeting faculty needs as contexts evolve.

Using the LMS Repository to Support a Culture of Assessment

The LMS repository can function as both an assessment resource hub and a data-gathering infrastructure that strengthens the college's culture of assessment. By centralizing teaching materials, professional development artifacts, and faculty engagement in one environment, it creates multiple, low-burden entry points for collecting meaningful evidence about teaching and learning.

Usage analytics and engagement patterns

Repository usage data (e.g., visits to specific sections, downloads of shared assignments, views of PD recordings) offer indirect indicators of which practices and resources faculty are actually using and valuing. These data can be disaggregated by role (adjunct/full-time), division, or course type to surface patterns in engagement and identify where additional support or outreach is needed.

Embedded reflection and implementation documentation

The shared resource libraries, communities of practice spaces, and mentoring areas can incorporate short reflection prompts and implementation check-ins. When faculty upload assignments, discuss course changes, or report back on PD, they can be invited to document what they tried, why, and what they observed in student work or engagement. Over time, these narrative and artifact-based data points can be coded for themes and linked to broader assessment questions (e.g., equity gaps, gateway course success).

Targeted inquiry connected to initiatives

The governance and PD sections can host simple, recurring surveys or mini-inquiry forms connected to specific initiatives, such as a UDL pathway or a shared-scoring day, so that evidence of impact (changes to assignments, shifts in grading practices, perceived effects on student learning) is captured in a consistent place. This keeps assessment data tied to the actions that generated it, rather than scattered across email threads or individual reports.

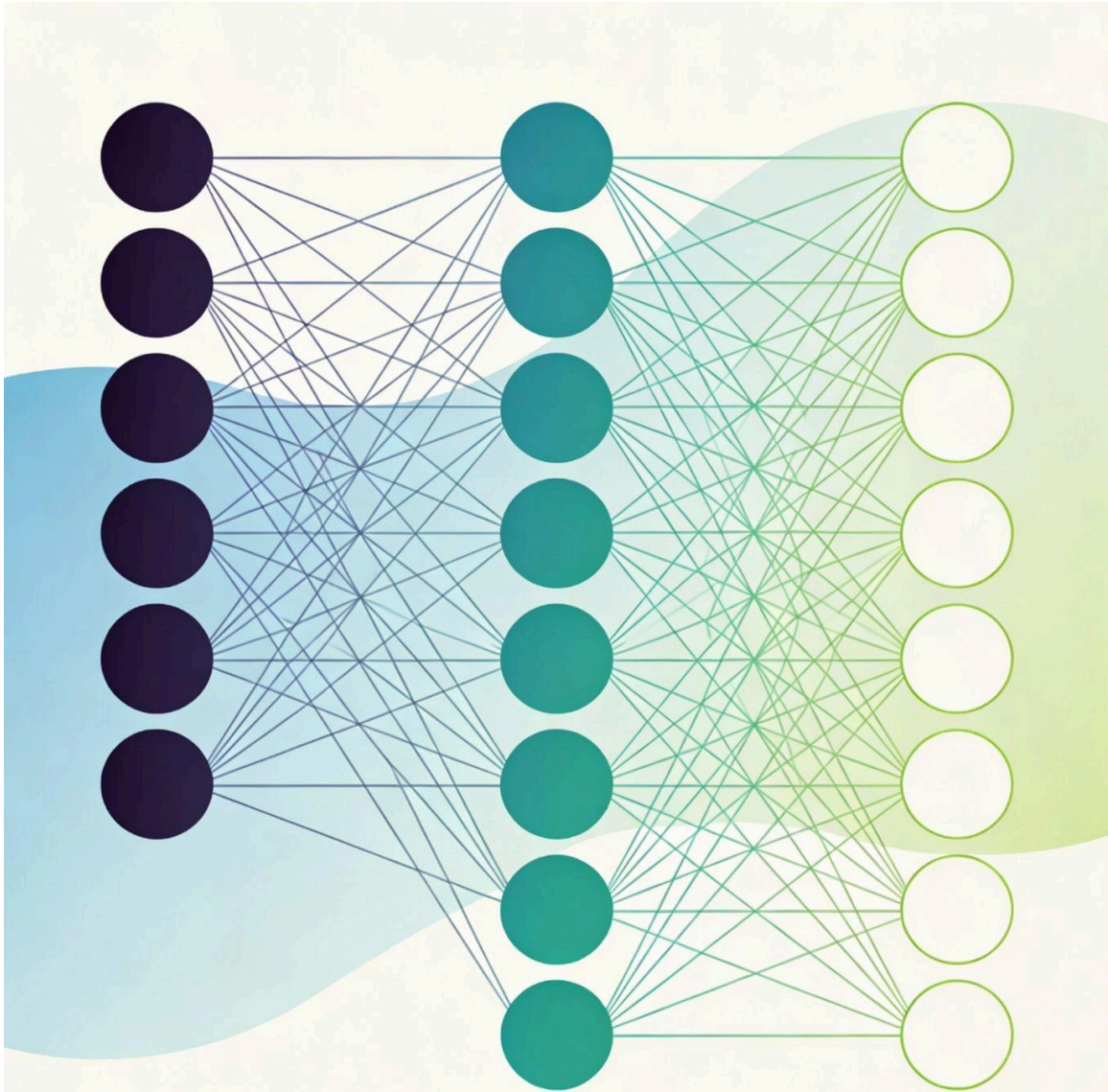
Closing the loop through transparency

Since the repository is designed around transparency and feedback loops, summary dashboards or brief "evidence stories" can be posted back into the LMS space, closing the loop by showing faculty how their participation and shared materials are informing program review, course redesign, and institutional decision-making. In this way, the repository does not just store assessment-related documents. It becomes a living infrastructure for continuous, faculty-driven inquiry into teaching and learning.

Conclusion: From Fragmentation to Integration

This online repository represents a commitment to meeting adjunct faculty where they work, providing the institutional visibility and access they deserve, and creating the conditions for all faculty and staff to participate fully in the teaching, governance, and community life of the institution. By consolidating scattered information, making decision-making transparent, providing practical teaching support, archiving professional learning, and fostering genuine community, the repository transforms the experience of contingent faculty from isolated and under-resourced to connected and empowered. It is infrastructure for equity, digital space that creates institutional belonging for those who have too often worked from the margins.

APPENDIX C



Reshaping Higher Education

A Guide to Distributed Leadership

in Community Colleges in

Adjunct & Leadership Toolkit

Prepared for community colleges, faculty organizations, and higher education advocates

Adjunct Governance and Teaching Toolkit

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About the Author and This Toolkit

This toolkit was created by Jennifer Burke Grehan as part of her Doctor of Letters (DLitt) research in Teaching in the Two-Year College at Drew University. It synthesizes scholarship on adjunct faculty governance, micro-leadership, curriculum design, and assessment with practice-based insights from community college teaching.

The toolkit is used in support of Grehan's DLitt dissertation and may also be adapted for institutional professional development, with full attribution to the author. For permissions or inquiries about broader use, please contact jgrehan@drew.edu

Reshaping Higher Education: A Guide to Distributed Leadership in Community Colleges

Adjunct faculty are not a side story in higher education. They are the story. In community colleges, they teach the majority of courses, carry the gateway classes that determine whether first-generation, working, multilingual, and returning adult students stay or leave, and hold the daily line between access as a slogan and access as a lived reality. Yet the very people who sustain the institution's mission are structurally excluded from the rooms where decisions are made, budgets are set, curricula are approved, and student success strategies are designed. This contradiction is not just a labor problem. It is a mission problem, an equity problem, and a democracy problem inside the institution itself.

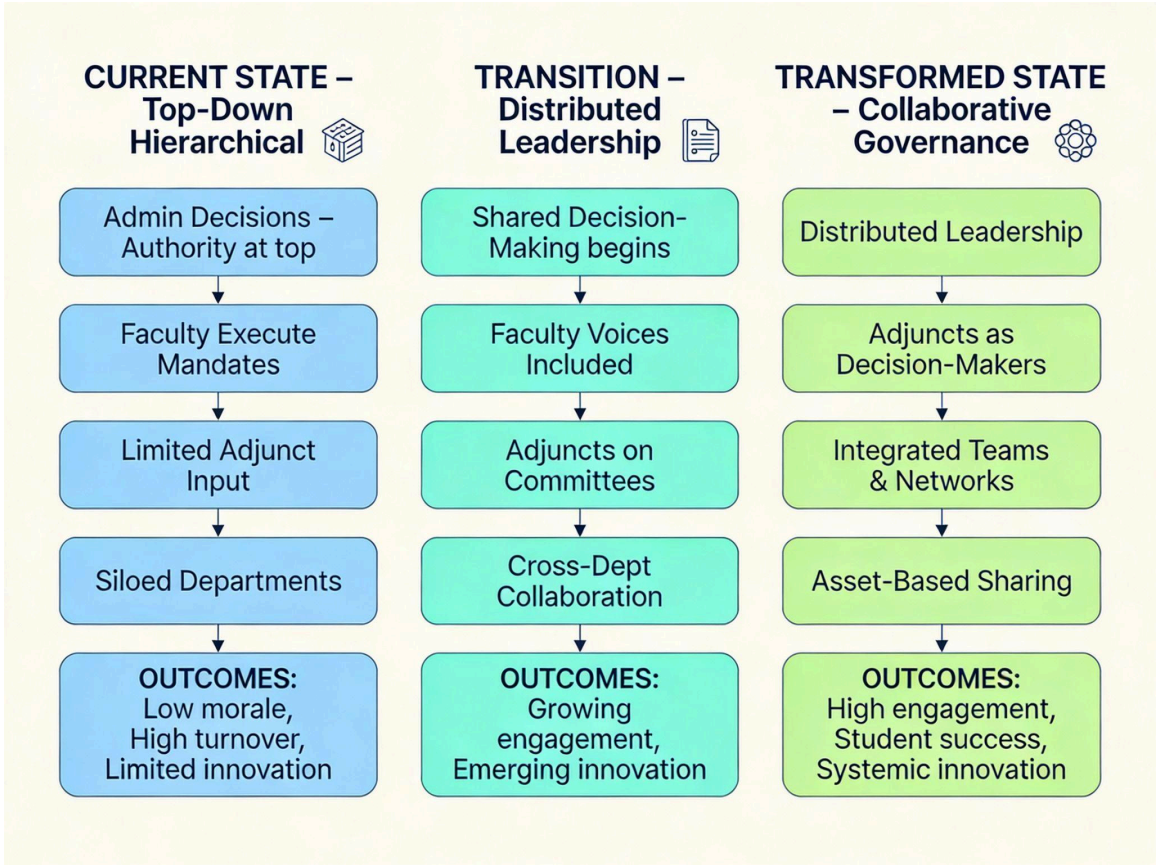
This work begins from a simple, uncomfortable truth: community colleges cannot claim equity while relying on a system that keeps their largest teaching workforce precarious, underpaid, and voiceless. The students who most rely on community colleges, students navigating low wages, caregiving, immigration systems, trauma, disability, and linguistic injustice, are overwhelmingly taught by faculty with the least security, least time, and least say in how the college functions. When adjuncts are isolated and silenced, students experience that silence as inconsistent instruction, vanished mentors, and courses that do not fully reflect their lives. Faculty working conditions become student learning conditions, and inequity moves from policy documents into classrooms, one term at a time.

This guide and toolkit are a refusal to accept that arrangement as natural or inevitable. They offer a different vision: governance where adjuncts hold compensated, voting seats; micro-leadership roles that turn everyday expertise into visible, recognized leadership;

communities of practice that replace isolation with collective problem-solving; curriculum tools that start from students' real lives; and assessment practices that treat evidence as shared inquiry instead of surveillance. At its core, this is a project of distributed leadership, of redesigning power so that those closest to students help decide what teaching, learning, and equity look like in practice.

You will not find generic recommendations here. You will find checklists that ask who has voice, agendas that script how to share power, templates that bake in compensation and representation, and stories that show what changes when adjuncts lead. The goal is not to add more tasks to already overburdened people, but to redesign structures so that the work many adjuncts are already doing, invisible leadership, unpaid mentoring, unofficial problem-solving, becomes named, shared, and supported. This toolkit is an invitation to departments, unions, senates, and senior leaders to move from sympathy for adjuncts to partnership with adjuncts, from “thank you for all you do” to “help us decide what we do next.”

The question that runs through every page is not whether adjunct faculty have earned a place in governance and leadership, they already have. The question is whether institutions are willing to align their structures with their values. This work begins wherever you are: in a department meeting, a teaching circle, a senate discussion, a planning retreat. It asks you to see adjunct colleagues not as temporary labor but as co-designers of the future of community college education. And it offers concrete tools so that, this time, the future looks different.



Introduction to the Toolkit

This toolkit grows out of a simple reality: adjunct faculty teach the majority of courses in community colleges yet remain largely absent from the decisions that shape their work and students' learning conditions. The materials that follow translate a distributed leadership vision into practical tools for governance, leadership, curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment that center adjunct expertise as a catalyst for student equity to create an environment for systemic innovation.

Rather than treating governance and assessment as compliance tasks, the toolkit frames them as shared inquiry led by the people closest to students: faculty across all ranks. It is designed for community colleges, unions, faculty organizations, and advocates who want to move from top-down decision-making toward collaborative, equity-focused structures.

Why Adjunct Inclusion and Distributed Leadership Matter

Adjunct and contingent faculty now teach more than 70% of community college courses in many systems, making them the backbone of instruction. Yet they are systematically excluded from governance, budgeting, and strategic planning spaces where institutional direction and working conditions are decided.

Research on equity-centered assessment, faculty engagement, and institutional change shows that when faculty broadly participate in decision-making, particularly those who teach the bulk of students, institutions see:

- Reduced burnout and turnover among instructors

- Stronger student learning outcomes and overall persistence
- Greater capacity to respond to changing student needs and policy contexts

Distributed leadership harnesses adjuncts' classroom expertise, professional experience, deep connections with students, and community-grounded knowledge to realign colleges with organizational goals and mission. While each college has its own unique mission and goals, this framework brings those closest to the students to the table. Using simple yet dynamic shifts in decision-making, colleges create an environment welcoming a transition from distributed leadership to a transformed state of collaborative governance, ensuring that those who are not always seen and heard, are included as change agents.

The Distributed Leadership Model

The guide positions distributed leadership as a shift from hierarchy to network, away from concentrated authority toward shared, cross-rank responsibility for key functions. In a traditional top-down model, decisions are often made by a small group of full-time faculty and administrators, with adjuncts brought in only to implement. You cannot move the entire college forward to support the mission and vision if you are leaving out 70% or more of the community.

In a distributed model:

- Decision-making authority is intentionally shared across faculty ranks, including adjuncts.
- Governance structures are redesigned so that the people doing the instructional work shape policies, curriculum, and assessment practices.

- Professional roles are broadened through micro-leadership opportunities (course leads, mentoring circles, working groups, communities of practice) that tap the expertise of contingent adjunct faculty.

This shift restructures higher education from compliance and constraint toward co-creation and agency, making institutional practices more aligned with stated commitments to mission and vision.

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Research on equity-centered assessment, faculty engagement, and institutional change shows that when faculty broadly participate in decision-making, particularly those who teach the bulk of students, institutions see:

- Reduced burnout and employee/faculty turnover
- Stronger student learning outcomes with increased persistence, retention, and completion
- Greater capacity to respond to changing student needs and policy contexts
- Increased morale encouraging creative thinking and innovation

Concrete Shifts This Toolkit Supports

Across its five sections, the toolkit translates the distributed leadership model into concrete, implementable shifts:

- Governance and structures (Section 1): Tools to audit where adjunct voice is present or absent, and to redesign committees, councils, and working groups so contingent faculty hold real, not symbolic, decision-making roles.
- Micro-leadership and communities of practice (Section 2): Role descriptions and community-of-practice templates that turn teaching circles, curriculum teams, and mentoring groups into recognized leadership pathways for adjuncts.
- Curriculum design for real lives (Section 3): Checklists and templates that center Community Cultural Wealth, critical language awareness, and realistic time constraints in gateway course design.

From Top-Down to Distributed Leadership: Transforming Community College Governance

- Reaching all learners (Section 4): Lesson planning and multilingual/trauma-informed routines that operationalize asset-based pedagogy in day-to-day instruction.
- Culture of assessment (Section 5): Inclusive assessment cycles, reflection tools, and shared scoring structures that move assessment from surveillance to shared inquiry and action.

Together, the framework impacts areas within the college structure that are critical for systemic innovation. These shifts create conditions where adjunct faculty move from isolation to community and from precarity to more stable, meaningful institutional roles.

What Changes When Adjuncts Lead

The distributed leadership model contains four interlocking areas of impact:

For adjunct faculty:

- Professional voice and institutional recognition
- Reduced isolation through communities of practice
- Clearer pathways for leadership and advancement
- Greater stability that allows for long-term instructional improvement.

For students:

- More consistent, engaged instruction from faculty, who stay
- Trauma-informed and culturally responsive teaching aligned with students' lives
- Faculty who reflect and understand student communities
- Classrooms better resourced through aligned policy and practice, college embedded support services, and instruction from subject matter experts

For institutions:

- Increased faculty retention, resulting in stronger institutional memory
- Improved student success and equity metrics
- Organizational cohesion producing an adaptive community that can respond intentionally to changing conditions
- Innovation emerging from bottom up, rather than top down.

For the higher education system:

- An effective model that demonstrates how to recognize faculty power and professional standing while building equity-centered governance and assessment practices that do not rely on precarity.

How to Use This Toolkit

The toolkit is designed to be modular and adaptable. Different audiences can enter at different points:

- Adjunct faculty and advocates might begin with governance audits, micro-leadership roles, and communities of practice (Sections 1–2) to build power and visibility.
- Department chairs and faculty leaders might start with curriculum and pedagogy tools (Sections 3–4) that weave equity and adjunct expertise directly into course and program design.
- Administrators and strategic leaders might focus first on assessment culture tools and committee structures (Sections 1 and 5) to align policies and resources with distributed leadership.

Each section includes practical tools (checklists, templates, agendas, and note-catchers) that can be piloted in one course, program, or department and then scaled. Small, concrete changes (creating one micro-leadership role, revising one gateway course, running one inclusive assessment cycle) compound over time into structural transformation.

The question this guide poses to every user is not whether change is possible, but how you will participate in leading change from any position within the ecosystem.

Three Modes of Engagement

Mode 1: Quick Start (2–4 hours)

- Pick ONE toolkit tool
- Use the facilitator's guide to run ONE meeting or workshop
- Measure what happens
- Decide: do we continue? Do we scale?

Mode 2: Departmental Pilot (1–2 semesters)

- Audit current state (Governance Checklist or Culture Reflection Tool)
- Implement ONE change (add an adjunct to a committee, launch a teaching circle, redesign one course)
- Gather feedback
- Expand to next change

Mode 3: Institutional Transformation (1–2 years)

- Use all five sections sequentially
- Build governance structures, micro-leadership roles, curriculum redesign, pedagogy, and assessment in coordinated way
- Measure impact on faculty retention, student outcomes, institutional culture
- Document and share lessons learned

Timeline by Toolkit Section

Section	Quick Start (first term)	Year 1 (build & pilot)	Years 2–3 (scale & embed)
Governance & Leadership	Run governance audit in 1–2 departments; add 1–2 adjunct seats to key committees.	Formalize inclusive committee design principles; pilot adjunct governance rep role.	Expand adjunct seats college-wide; write expectations into bylaws/handbooks; add stipends to budget.
Micro-Leadership & Communities of Practice	Launch one adjunct teaching circle or mentoring group in a gateway course.	Create 3–5 micro-leadership roles (course leads, fellows); run one full CoP cycle.	Establish annual adjunct leadership cohort; fund ongoing CoPs across programs.
Curriculum Design for Real Lives	Use the checklist to revise one high-impact assignment in a gateway course.	Redesign 1–2 gateway courses with adjuncts as co-designers; align outcomes and assessments.	Integrate equity-centered design into program review; require adjunct participation in curriculum processes.
Reaching All Learners	Pilot the “Reaching All Learners” lesson planner in 1–2 sections; adopt 1–2 multilingual/trauma-informed routines.	Department-wide use of planners in gateway courses; shared menu of multilingual and UDL practices.	Make these routines part of PD expectations, evaluations, and new-faculty onboarding.
Culture of Assessment	Run one inclusive assessment cycle including adjunct-taught sections; hold one shared scoring meeting.	Use the Assessment Culture Reflection Tool in a department retreat; tie findings to curriculum/PD changes.	Embed inclusive cycles and shared scoring into institutional assessment calendar and policy.

Rough Cost Ranges by Section (per year)

Assumes a mid-sized community college; you can adjust stipends/hourly rates to local norms.

Section	Low-Investment Scenario (reuse existing funds)	Moderate Investment (recommended)	High-Investment / Grant-Funded Option
Governance & Leadership	Small stipends for 2–4 adjunct committee seats (e.g., \$500–\$2,000 total).	6–10 compensated seats + 1–2 governance reps (approx. \$8,000–\$20,000).	Broad adjunct representation across core committees (\$25,000–\$50,000+).
Micro-Leadership & CoPs	Unpaid pilot teaching circle using existing meeting times.	Stipends for 3–5 course leads/fellows + 2–3 CoP facilitators (\$10,000–\$30,000).	Formal adjunct leadership program, multiple cohorts, robust stipends (\$40,000–\$75,000).
Curriculum Design for Real Lives	Integrate work into existing curriculum meetings; no additional pay.	Summer or intersession curriculum stipends for a small redesign team (\$8,000–\$25,000).	Multi-year, grant-funded redesign of multiple pathways (\$50,000–\$100,000+).
Reaching All Learners	Use tools in existing PD days; no new dollars.	2–4 adjunct-inclusive workshops + small planning stipends (\$5,000–\$15,000).	Comprehensive PD series with release time and coaching (\$25,000–\$60,000).
Culture of Assessment	Fold into current assessment work; 1–2 unpaid pilots.	Stipends for adjunct participation in cycles and shared scoring (\$7,500–\$20,000).	Fully resourced inclusive assessment infrastructure (\$30,000–\$70,000+).



SECTION 1: GOVERNANCE & LEADERSHIP



ADJUNCT & LEADERSHIP TOOLKIT

Distributed Governance, Equitable Curriculum, and a Culture of Assessment

Introduction to Building Shared Power and Voice

Community colleges cannot fulfill their access mission while relying on governance systems that sideline the very people who teach most of the courses. Adjunct faculty carry the core of instruction, yet structures for voice, voting, and leadership remain concentrated in a small circle of full-time faculty and administrators. This section begins from that structural contradiction and offers tools for redesigning governance so that contingent faculty are not peripheral labor but full partners in shared decision-making.

The resources in this section translate research on shared governance, distributed leadership, and adjunct wellbeing into practical instruments. They invite departments and colleges to map who currently holds power, identify where adjuncts are missing, and build pathways for representation that are compensated, transparent, and durable. Rather than treating participation as a personal favor or a symbolic invitation, these tools assume that adjunct voice is a condition for ethical practice and institutional effectiveness.

Why Governance Matters: The Research

Research across governance structures, distributed leadership models, and labor studies shows that **faculty participation in decision-making reduces burnout, strengthens teaching quality, and enables institutions to respond quickly to change.**

When adjunct faculty have meaningful voice in governance:

- **Burnout decreases.** Participation in decision-making and workplace support are primary protective factors
- **Teaching improves.** Instructional coherence increases when faculty coordinate curriculum and assessment
- **Retention rises.** Stable faculty teach better and advocate for continuous improvement
- **Innovation accelerates.** Ground-level expertise shapes institutional decisions and drives change
- **Mission aligns with practice.** Institutional priorities, equity, student success, retention, completion, are more likely to be met when educators who spend the most time with students have voice in planning

Yet current governance structures persistently exclude adjuncts from decision-making in critical domains:

- **Budgets.** Adjuncts rarely participate in resource allocation, even though they teach most students
- **Strategic planning.** Long-term direction is set without input from contingent faculty
- **Professional development.** Adjuncts are excluded from designing or selecting content that affects their teaching
- **Hiring and retention.** Decisions about staffing patterns ignore adjunct expertise and preferences
- **Assessment and curriculum.** While adjuncts teach the courses, full-time faculty often control what and how students learn

What This Section Helps You Do

- **See the governance system clearly:** Who decides what? Who is consulted? Who is absent?
- **Design inclusive committees and decision structures** with guaranteed adjunct seats and compensation
- **Plan concrete steps** to move from advisory participation to genuine shared authority over curriculum, planning, and resources
- **Create transparent processes** so decisions and their rationales are communicated back to all faculty
- **Build accountability** into governance so the adjunct voice actually influences outcomes.

Tools You Will Find Here

1.1 Governance Audit Checklist

Map where adjuncts currently have voice, vote, and visibility in governance. Identify specific gaps and quick wins.

1.2 Inclusive Committee Design Principles

Five foundational principles for building committees where adjunct participation is real, not performative.

1.3 Governance Map Worksheet

Visual worksheet for departments and divisions to identify decision domains and design adjunct inclusion.

1.4 Governance Communication & Feedback Protocol

Template for ensuring decisions and rationales are communicated transparently back to all faculty.

1.5 Adjunct Governance Representative Role Description

Ready-to-use description for creating a formal liaison position that brings adjunct perspectives into key committees.

How These Tools Work Together

The governance audit helps you see the current state honestly. The inclusive committee design principles provide the "how", concrete standards for real participation. The governance map helps you plan which domains to prioritize. The communication protocol ensures transparency.

The representative role description formalizes the position.

Used together, they provide the foundation for the micro-leadership roles, communities of practice, curriculum work, and assessment cultures that appear in later sections of this toolkit.

A Note on Compensation

Throughout this section, you will notice that **compensation is non-negotiable**. Research is clear: unpaid service becomes tokenistic. When colleges compensate adjuncts for governance work, through stipends, course releases, or time credits, it signals that participation is valued, removes barriers (especially for adjuncts juggling multiple jobs), and increases participation.

Compensation also aligns with a basic principle of justice: if your institution expects someone to contribute labor, even cognitive and relational labor in meetings, that labor should be paid.

Getting Started

Choose one entry point:

- If your college has **never audited governance**, start with the Governance Audit Checklist (1.1)
- If you want to **redesign a specific committee**, use the Inclusive Committee Design Principles (1.2)
- If you're a **department wanting to map your decisions**, use the Governance Map Worksheet (1.3)
- If you're a **faculty advocate** wanting to create a formal governance role, use the Adjunct Governance Representative description (1.4)

SECTION 1: GOVERNANCE & LEADERSHIP

The Problem

Community colleges rely on adjunct faculty to teach 70% of courses, yet systematically exclude them from governance, budgeting, curriculum committees, and strategic planning. This exclusion is not incidental, it is structural. The toolkit's governance tools help identify and dismantle these barriers.

Where to Start: The Governance Audit

Timing: 1–2 hours, ideally in a department meeting or small group

Who should facilitate: Department chair, faculty governance representative, or adjunct advocate

What you'll need:

- Printed copy of Toolkit 1.1 (Governance Audit Checklist)
- Flip chart or document to record answers
- 5–10 colleagues (mix of adjunct and full-time if possible)

Facilitator's Language (Opening):

"Thank you for being here. We're going to spend the next hour mapping governance in our department—who decides what, who's consulted, and crucially, where adjuncts are or aren't in the picture. This is not about blame. It's about visibility. Right now, these decisions happen, but

we don't have a clear picture of the pattern. Today, we're going to see it. Then we can decide what to change."

Meeting Agenda: Governance Audit (60 minutes)

0–5 min: Welcome & Frame

- "We're mapping decision-making pathways, not judging people."
- "Honesty is the goal. If we don't see the gaps, we can't fix them."

5–20 min: Part A (Core Decision Domains)

- Read each domain aloud: Teaching & Learning, Curriculum, Policy, Assessment, Scheduling, Hiring, Budget, DEI/Student Success
- For each, ask: "Where do adjuncts currently have voice?"
 - No one involved?
 - Consulted informally only?
 - Formal advisory seat?
 - Voting seat?
 - Co-leading?
- Record on flip chart or document

20–35 min: Part B (Core Committees)

- List every committee that exists in your department or college
- For each, mark: Does it exist? Are adjuncts members? Do they vote? Are they paid?
- Ask: "Which committees matter most? Where do the biggest decisions happen?"

35–45 min: Part C (Quick Wins & Gaps)

- Ask: "Where do adjuncts most need a seat in the next year?"
- Record top 3 priorities
- Ask: "What could we change TODAY or THIS MONTH with minimal approval?"
 - Add one adjunct to one committee?
 - Create an email list for adjuncts to hear about decisions?
 - Pay adjuncts for committee work?

45–60 min: Next Steps

- "What did you notice?"
- "What surprised you?"
- "What will we do with this information?"
- Assign: "Who will take these findings to [Dean / Provost / Faculty Senate]?"

Facilitator Tips: Handling Resistance

If people say: *"Adjuncts are too busy. They can't come to meetings."*

Respond with: *"That's a real constraint. AND it's solvable. The toolkit's Inclusive Committee Design Principles (Tool 1.2) addresses exactly this: stagger meeting times, offer remote participation, pay stipends. Adjuncts can participate if we remove barriers."*

If people say: *"We tried including adjuncts before. They didn't show up."*

Respond with: *"That tells us something important. Did we compensate them? Were meetings at convenient times? Did we follow up after meetings to show their voice mattered? Participation requires both structural support AND relationship-building. We can try again differently."*

If people say: *"This will take too much time. We're already overwhelmed."*

Respond with: *"Yes, you're overwhelmed. AND research shows that when faculty participate in governance, burnout actually decreases. Better decisions take less time to implement. We're investing time upfront to save time later."*

Moving Forward: From Audit to Action

After the governance audit, you have three paths:

Path A: Quick Win

- Pick ONE committee where an adjunct seat would make immediate sense
- Add that seat THIS MONTH
- Make sure it's compensated and the person is welcomed
- Measure: Do they come? Do they feel heard? Do they come back?

Path B: Design a New Structure

- Use Toolkit 1.2 (Inclusive Committee Design Principles) to redesign your committee structure entirely
- Apply the five principles to each core committee
- Roll out 1–2 redesigned committees next semester

Path C: Create an Adjunct Governance Representative Role

- Use Toolkit 1.4 to design and fill a formal, compensated governance role
- This person attends multiple committees and reports back to adjunct colleagues
- Builds systemic participation, not just one-off seats

1.1 Governance Audit Checklist

Purpose: See clearly where adjuncts have no seat, advisory role, or real power in core governance domains and committees.

Part A: Core Decision Domains

* For each domain, check the current level of adjunct involvement and note compensation.

Decision Domain <i>Prompt: Where do adjuncts most need a voting, compensated presence in the next year?</i>	No adjuncts involved	Consult informal only	Formal non-voting seat	Voting seat(s)	Co-chair/Lead	Is this compensated? (Y/N & how)
Teaching & Learning priorities (PD, modalities, supports)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Curriculum (new programs, course approvals, revisions)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Academic policy (grading, attendance, course caps, repeats)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Assessment (program review, SLOs, DFW/equity analysis)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Student success initiatives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Hiring & evaluation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Budget & resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Scheduling & staffing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Part B: Core Committees Snapshot

List each existing committee and complete:

- Does this committee exist?
- Are adjuncts members? In what role?
- How many seats? Voting?
- Is participation compensated? How?

Committee	Exist (Y/N)	Adjuncts present?	Voting rights	# Adjunct Seats	Compensation	Notes /Issues
Teaching & Learning Committee	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Occasional guest <input type="checkbox"/> Standing member	<input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Limited <input type="checkbox"/> Full			
Curriculum Committee	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Occasional guest <input type="checkbox"/> Standing member	<input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Limited <input type="checkbox"/> Full			
Policy Committee (ex. Academic Policies Body)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Occasional guest <input type="checkbox"/> Standing member	<input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Limited <input type="checkbox"/> Full			
Assessment Committee	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Occasional guest <input type="checkbox"/> Standing member	<input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Limited <input type="checkbox"/> Full			

Part C: Quick Wins & Structural Gaps

Now that you have identified where adjunct roles exist within the college structure, you can identify areas of need in the short term and long term. Use this section to reflect and prioritize.

Top 3 places adjuncts urgently need a seat or vote:

- _____
- _____
- _____

Quick wins (Done within academic year, minimal approval required):

- Add 1 compensated adjunct seat to _____.
- Establish a standing agenda slot for adjunct concerns on _____.
- Create an email list / Teams space to summarize decisions for all adjuncts.

Long Term Goal Areas (May expand beyond one year and require approval):

- _____
- _____

Opportunities, Challenges, and Barriers

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

1.2 Inclusive Committee Design Principles

Purpose: Provide a simple standard so committee structures are never “adjunct-optional” or tokenistic, especially in Teaching & Learning, Curriculum, Policy, and Assessment committees.

Principle 1: Guaranteed Adjunct Representation

- Minimum of 2 adjunct seats on each core committee (Teaching & Learning, Curriculum, Policy, Assessment) to avoid isolation/tokenism.
- Seats are voting, not “observer only,” unless legally prohibited.

Design question: How many adjuncts will serve on each core committee, and how will you ensure they are not the only contingent voice in the room?

Principle 2: Transparent Selection & Term Limits

- Written process for how adjuncts are nominated, selected, or elected (e.g., open call + elections, or selection by adjunct caucus/union).
- Term length of 1–2 years, with an option to renew, so people rotate and more colleagues gain experience.

Design question: Where will the selection process for adjunct committee members be posted so all can see it?

Principle 3: Sized for Contingency (Time, Pay, Scheduling)

- Meetings scheduled to avoid typical teaching peaks (e.g., avoid late-afternoon blocks heavily used by adjuncts).
- Clear expectation of hours per month, with matching stipend or load credit.
- Remote or hybrid participation available where possible.

Design question: How will you compensate adjunct committee work, and what's the minimum predictable time commitment you can guarantee?

Principle 4: Two-Way Communication

Every committee role includes a communication function, not just attendance.

- Adjunct members agree to send brief recap emails or posts after each meeting.
- Committees commit to receiving and responding to feedback from adjuncts not in the room.

Design question: What standard template or protocol will you use for communicating out decisions to adjunct colleagues?

Principle 5: Equity & Power Awareness

- Committee charters explicitly name equity, inclusion, and labor status as relevant to decisions (e.g., how a policy will affect adjuncts and students).

- Chairs are responsible for inviting adjunct perspectives, not waiting for them to fight for airtime.

Design question: Where in your Teaching & Learning, Curriculum, Policy, and Assessment committee charters will you explicitly state expectations for adjunct inclusion and equity impact review?

1.3 Governance Map Worksheet

Purpose: Map who actually decides, who is consulted, and where the adjunct voice enters or disappears across key decisions.

Step 1: List Your Core Committees

Start with four defaults, then add local ones.

- Teaching & Learning Committee
 - Curriculum Committee
 - Policy Committee
 - Assessment Committee
 - Other: _____
 - Other: _____
-

Step 2: Decision Pathways Table

For each committee, identify its major decisions, who has formal authority, and where adjuncts are in the flow.

Committee	Example decisions	Who proposes?	Who must be consulted?	Who recommends?	Who decides (final)?	Adjunct role now	Ideal adjunct role in 3 years
Teaching & Learning	PD priorities, teaching modalities, classroom support tools						
Curriculum	New courses, program changes, course outlines						
Policy	Academic standing rules, withdrawal deadlines, grading options						
Assessment	Program review schedule, SLO measures, DFW review						

Prompt: Where in these pathways could an Adjunct Governance Representative (from Tool 1.4) insert feedback or carry information back?

Step 3: Visual Map (Simple Version)

Draw boxes for:

- Board / President / VPAA
- Teaching & Learning, Curriculum, Policy, Assessment Committees
- Departments / Programs
- Adjunct Faculty

Then use arrows to show:

- Where proposals start.
- Which committees review them.
- Where final decisions are made.
- Where information flows back to adjuncts (or fails to).

Two guiding questions:

1. For a change in a common assignment in a gateway course, trace the path from idea → decision → communication. Where is adjunct voice explicit?
 2. For a new grading policy, where and when could adjuncts shape the outcome before it is final?
-

1.4 Adjunct Governance Representative Description

Purpose: Formalize a named, compensated role that links adjuncts to the four core committees and other governance bodies, and ensures two-way communication.

Role Summary

The Adjunct Governance Representative:

- Serves as a voting member (where permitted) or designated liaison to the Teaching & Learning, Curriculum, Policy, and Assessment Committees.
 - Gathers concerns and ideas from adjunct colleagues and brings them into committee discussions.
 - Reports back after each meeting so adjunct faculty understand decisions and next steps.
-

Core Responsibilities

1. Committee Engagement (approx. 50% of role)
 - Attend assigned meetings of Teaching & Learning, Curriculum, Policy, and/or Assessment Committees (typically 2–4 per month).
 - Review agendas and materials in advance, noting impacts on adjuncts and students.
 - Participate actively in discussion and voting, raising adjunct-specific implications (scheduling, workload, compensation, student support).

2. Constituency Communication (approx. 40% of role)

- Before key votes, solicit input from adjuncts (brief poll, email, or form).
- After each meeting, send a short recap using a standard template.
- Maintain a simple log of issues raised by adjuncts and how committees responded.

3. Advocacy & Problem Solving (approx. 10% of role)

- Identify patterns in adjunct concerns (e.g., policy changes that disproportionately affect contingent faculty).
 - Work with department chairs, union leaders, or administrators to address systemic issues.
 - Recommend improvements to committee structures to better include adjuncts.
-

Time, Compensation, and Term

- Time estimate: 3–5 hours per month per committee covered (meeting time, prep, communication).
- Compensation options:
 - Stipend per semester (e.g., \$800–\$1,500, scaled to number of committees), OR
 - Hourly pay for all work (including prep/communication), OR
 - Partial course release where feasible.
- Term: 1–2 years, renewable, with a brief annual review.

Selection & Accountability

Selection:

- Nominated and elected by adjunct colleagues, or
- Appointed by an Adjunct Council/union with clear, public criteria.

Accountability:

Shares an annual summary of activities, wins, and unresolved issues.

Subject to recall or non-renewal by adjunct constituency if communication or participation is not occurring.

Sample Email Template (for quick use)

Subject: [Committee Name] Update – What Changed & What It Means

Hi colleagues,

Here's a brief recap from the [Teaching & Learning / Curriculum / Policy / Assessment] Committee meeting on [date]:

- *Decision: [One-sentence description]*
- *Why: [Plain-language rationale]*
- *Impact on adjuncts/students: [What will change in our classrooms or working conditions]*
- *Next steps / timeline: [What to expect, by when]*

Questions or concerns? Reply to this email or use this form: [link].

[Name]

Adjunct Governance Representative

This set of tools positions adjunct faculty as essential partners in governance and makes Teaching & Learning, Curriculum, Policy, and Assessment committees the default spaces where that partnership is realized.

However you begin, begin. One conversation, one audit, one new seat on a committee changes what is possible.



SECTION 2: MICRO-LEADERSHIP & COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE



Introduction to Building Distributed Expertise and Belonging

Leadership in community colleges cannot be reduced to titles and formal positions. Research on distributed leadership and grassroots change shows that institutions shift when everyday experts are invited into structured roles with time, recognition, and support. For adjunct faculty, those roles are usually missing, even though their experience with students and courses makes them central to any effort to improve equity and learning.

This section focuses on **micro-leadership**, manageable, clearly defined responsibilities that adjuncts and full-time faculty can assume without needing a new job description or abandoning their primary teaching work. Course leads, teaching fellows, and governance representatives become the connective tissue between classrooms, departments, and institutional priorities. Alongside these roles, communities of practice and mentoring circles turn isolated effort into shared inquiry and collective problem-solving.

Why Micro-Leadership Matters: The Research

Research on distributed leadership, faculty leadership development, and communities of practice shows that **structured roles grounded in real work, combined with peer learning communities, reduce isolation, build belonging, and drive sustainable instructional change.**

When adjunct faculty have access to micro-leadership roles and communities of practice:

- **Isolation decreases.** Peer mentoring and communities of practice reduce the solitude that often characterizes adjunct work, building belonging and professional identity.
- **Teaching coherence increases.** When instructors teaching the same course meet regularly to align assignments, rubrics, and feedback routines, students encounter consistent expectations and better support.
- **Innovation travels.** Grassroots expertise emerges from everyday practice. When adjuncts hold visible leadership roles, course leads, mentoring circle facilitators, their innovations influence program-wide practices.
- **Professional identity strengthens.** Named roles, stipends or credits, and public recognition signal that adjuncts are colleagues and co-leaders, not peripheral labor.
- **Burnout markers improve.** Studies of burnout in higher education show that meaningful work, participation in decision-making, and supportive peer relationships are protective factors.
- **Student outcomes improve.** Faculty working in coordinated teams with shared frameworks report better student engagement and learning outcomes.

Yet current structures rarely provide these opportunities for adjunct faculty. Professional development is often:

- **One-time and disconnected** from ongoing classroom work and curriculum.
- **Top-down**, designed by administrators or full-time faculty without adjunct input.
- **Unpaid**, adding to already-stretched time and budget constraints.
- **Isolated**, held in formats that do not build ongoing peer relationships.
- **Assumed to stick** without follow-up, peer accountability, or shared problem-solving.

What This Section Helps You Do

- **Create micro-leadership roles** that tap adjunct expertise and draw from real work (courses, curriculum projects, student support, assessment).
- **Launch and facilitate communities of practice** that meet regularly around shared courses and student work, not one-off workshops.
- **Build mentoring circles and peer networks** that reduce professional isolation and create spaces for collective inquiry.
- **Design sustainable structures** sized for contingent conditions: clear time boundaries, modest resource needs, transparent compensation.
- **Formalize recognition** through titles, stipends, and public acknowledgment so leadership feels real and valued.
- **Create feedback loops** so adjunct voices and innovations reach departmental and institutional decisions.

Tools You Will Find Here

2.1 Adjunct Course Lead Role Description

Coordinate pedagogy, assessment, and communication for multi-section gateway courses. Clear responsibilities, time commitment, and compensation.

2.2 Adjunct Teaching Fellow Role Description

Lead a focused improvement project (e.g., redesigning a common assignment, creating multilingual supports, integrating new pedagogies). Semester-long fellowship with deliverables.

2.3 Adjunct Governance Representative Role Description

Ensure contingent faculty perspectives are present in key decision-making bodies and that decisions are communicated back to colleagues.

2.4 Community of Practice / Mentoring Circle Facilitation Guide

Step-by-step guide for launching and sustaining a peer learning community. Includes sample agendas, facilitation notes, and protocols for case clinics and planning sessions.

2.5 Adjunct Leadership Fellows Program Template

Design a year-long program that cultivates 3–5 adjunct leaders per cohort through mentoring, project work, and professional development.

2.6 Pulse Survey: Voice, Belonging, and Professional Learning

Light-weight, recurring survey to assess whether adjuncts feel heard, connected to colleagues, and able to implement what they learn.

How These Tools Work Together

The role descriptions (2.1–2.3) create the formal positions. The facilitation guide (2.4) equips people to lead peer learning. The fellows program (2.5) provides a longer-arc container for leadership development. The pulse survey (2.6) measures whether these structures are actually reducing isolation and building voice.

Used together with Section 1 governance tools, these create a coherent system: governance structures ensure adjuncts have formal seats at decision tables; micro-leadership roles distribute leadership throughout the college; communities of practice provide the relational foundation for shared teaching and learning.

A Note on Facilitation and Peer Leadership

These tools assume that **adjuncts can facilitate and lead peer learning—and that they often do already.**

Facilitation does not require special credentials. It requires:

- Clarity about the group's purpose
- Simple protocols for meetings (agendas, roles, time boundaries)
- Genuine interest in colleagues' teaching and thinking
- Permission to learn facilitation on the job with light support

When adjuncts facilitate, peer learning feels safer and more credible than when it comes only from "experts." Peer facilitators understand the constraints, speak the language of contingency, and model that change is possible.

Getting Started

Choose one entry point:

- If your college wants to **launch a mentoring circle or community of practice**, start with Tool 2.4 (Facilitation Guide)
- If you want to **create a formal course lead or teaching fellow role**, use Tools 2.1 or 2.2 (Role Descriptions)
- If you're designing a **larger leadership development program**, use Tool 2.5 (Fellows Program Template)
- If you want to **measure whether communities are reducing isolation**, use Tool 2.6 (Pulse Survey)
- If your **governance work (Section 1) has created new adjunct committee seats**, use Tool 2.3 (Governance Representative Role)

Start small. One mentoring circle. One course lead. One fellowship cohort. Let it grow and evolve based on what you learn from the pulse survey and peer feedback.

SECTION 2: MICRO-LEADERSHIP & COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

The Problem

Adjuncts are isolated. They teach courses, leave, and encounter minimal peer connection or leadership opportunity. This increase in an online environment. Isolation drives burnout and turnover. Micro-leadership roles and communities of practice are the antidote: structured, named roles with peer connection.

Where to Start: Launching a Teaching Circle / Community of Practice

Timing: 1.5–2 hours to launch; ongoing monthly or biweekly thereafter

Who should facilitate: An adjunct, a full-time faculty member, or a peer facilitator trained using Toolkit 2.4

Who should join: 4–8 faculty (adjunct and/or full-time) teaching the same course or facing a shared teaching challenge

What you'll need:

- Toolkit 2.4 (Community of Practice Facilitation Guide)
- Simple agenda (see below)
- Optional: one article or case to discuss
- Refreshments (signals this is valued)

Facilitator's Language (Invitation & Opening):

"I'm starting a teaching circle—a peer group that meets monthly to think together about teaching challenges. It's informal, confidential, and grounded in what actually happens in your classroom. No judgment, no evaluations. Just colleagues sharing strategies. The first meeting is [date/time]. We'll read one short article together and talk about what's working for each of us. Come if you're interested. Bring your real questions."

Meeting Agenda: First Teaching Circle (90 minutes)

0–10 min: Welcome & Norms

- "Welcome. This is a peer space, not a training. Everything shared here is confidential."
- "Ground rules: listen without judgment, share honestly, respect each other's time."

10–20 min: Introductions & Why We're Here

- Each person: "What's one thing you're teaching this term? What's one challenge you're thinking about?"
- Listen. Don't problem-solve yet. Just notice what's shared.

20–40 min: Shared Reading or Case (Optional)

- Read a 2–3 page article on a teaching strategy (multilingual writers, active learning, assessment, etc.)
- Discuss: "What stands out? What connects to your teaching? What questions does it raise?"

40–70 min: Case Clinic or Problem-Solving

- Pick ONE person's challenge: "I'm struggling with X. Here's what I've tried. What do you see? What might work?"
- Others ask clarifying questions, share similar challenges, offer ideas
- Presenter is not obligated to take advice—just to hear perspectives

70–85 min: What We'll Do Next

- "Did this feel valuable? Should we keep meeting?"
- If yes: "Same time next month? Different focus? Should we read something different?"
- Set next date now

85–90 min: Closing

- "Thank you. This matters. I'll send a brief recap."

Facilitator Tips: Keeping It Going

Challenge: *Only 2 people show up to the second meeting.*

Solution:

- Reach out individually: "I noticed you weren't there. What got in the way? Is there a better time?"
- Rethink timing, or go to a hybrid format (some attend in person, some join remotely)

- Make it SO valuable that people prioritize it

Challenge: *One person dominates; others stay quiet.*

Solution:

- Use a structure: "Let's go around. Each person, one teaching win from this week."
- Invite quietly: "We haven't heard from you yet. What's working in your classes?"
- Acknowledge: "We're hearing a lot from [name]. I want to make sure everyone has airtime."

Challenge: *People come but nothing changes in their teaching.*

Solution:

- This is normal. Communities of practice build slowly. Change emerges over time.
- At meeting 4 or 5, ask: "Has anything from our circles shown up in your teaching? What shifted?"
- Some people are there for connection, not change. Both are valid.

Formalizing Micro-Leadership Roles

Once a teaching circle or community of practice is running, you can formalize leadership:

Option 1: Name a Facilitator

- Use Toolkit 2.4 language
- Specify time commitment (5 hours per month)

- Offer modest stipend (\\$400–\\$600/semester) or course credit
- Make it official: announce it, introduce the person

Option 2: Create a Course Lead Position

- Use Toolkit 2.1
- Designate someone to coordinate a multi-section course
- Responsibilities: align assignments, share rubrics, meet with other sections
- Time commitment: 8–10 hours per month
- Compensation: \\$800–\\$1,500/semester or 0.5 course release

Option 3: Launch a Teaching Fellows Program

- Use Toolkit 2.5
- Select 3–5 adjuncts for a year-long fellowship
- Structure: monthly meetings, project work, mentoring, professional development
- Deliverable: each fellow leads a peer learning initiative or curriculum redesign
- Compensation: \\$2,000–\\$4,000 stipend + course materials/conference attendance

Measuring Impact

After 3–4 months of communities of practice:

Ask participants:

- "Do you feel less isolated?" (Yes / Somewhat / No)
- "Have you tried anything new from the group?" (Give examples)
- "Will you come back?" (Renewal rate)

- "What should we change?" (Improve the structure)

Track:

- **Attendance & retention:** Are people coming back?
- **Peer connections:** Are faculty building relationships?
- **Teaching change:** Are they trying new strategies?
- **Retention:** Are participants more likely to stay at the college?

SECTION 2 TOOLS

2.1: ADJUNCT COURSE LEAD ROLE DESCRIPTION

Purpose

Coordinate pedagogy, assessment, communication, and resource-sharing for a multi-section gateway course (e.g., ENG 101/111, MAT 100, PSY 101) taught by adjunct and full-time faculty. The course lead ensures curricular coherence, fosters peer collaboration, and surfaces adjunct expertise into departmental and program-level decisions.

Key Responsibilities

Course Coordination (60% of role)

- Convene instructors teaching the course **3–4 times per term** (1–1.5 hours each) to align learning outcomes, major assignments, rubrics, and grading practices
- Maintain a **shared course repository** (LMS shell, Google Drive, or wiki) with common prompts, model syllabi, sample rubrics, and exemplars of student work
- Create and share a **course-level assessment dashboard** documenting student success metrics, DFW rates, and equity gaps
- Facilitate **brief peer feedback cycles** (e.g., instructors exchange syllabi or share one assignment for peer review)

Liaison & Advocacy (25% of role)

- **Represent course instructors** in department curriculum meetings, assessment committees, and program reviews
- **Surface adjunct concerns and recommendations** (e.g., scheduling issues, resource gaps, pedagogical questions) to department leadership
- **Report back clearly** on decisions, rationales, and next steps so all instructors feel informed
- **Champion equitable practices** (multilingual supports, trauma-informed design, UDL) in course-level discussions

Professional Development & Innovation (15% of role)

- **Facilitate or coordinate 1–2 teaching discussions per term** focusing on shared challenges (e.g., online discussion engagement, multilingual writing support, inclusive assessment)
- **Document and share innovations** emerging from peer conversations so good practices spread
- **Connect instructors to external resources**, professional development, or conference opportunities relevant to the course

Time & Compensation

- **Course release:** 1–2 credits per term, OR

- **Stipend:** \$1,000–\$1,500 per term (adjust based on institutional budget), OR
- **Time credit:** 2–3 hours per week during fall and spring, released from one other obligation
- **Professional development budget:** \$300–\$500 annually for conference attendance, journals, or online resources
- **Recognition:** Formal acknowledgment in department communications, annual report, and on course materials

Desired Qualifications

- **Successful recent teaching** in the course (within past 2 years)
- **Commitment to equity-minded, asset-based pedagogy** and willingness to lead conversations about multilingual students, first-generation learners, and working adults
- **Willingness to learn facilitation** informally; no special credentials required
- **Collaborative spirit:** genuine interest in peer growth, not policing or hierarchy
- **Time management:** ability to plan meetings, send reminders, and follow through on documentation

Success Indicators (Measured Annually)

- ✓ Instructors report feeling informed about course expectations and changes
- ✓ Course repository is used by 70%+ of instructors
- ✓ Attendance at coordination meetings averages 70%+

- ✓ Adjunct instructors report reduced isolation and increased belonging
- ✓ Course-level DFW rates and equity gaps move in positive direction or stabilize

Sample Three-Year Growth Arc

Year 1: Establish cadence, create repository, surface instructor voices

Year 2: Deepen assessment use, expand innovations, formalize liaison role

Year 3: Lead program-level curriculum redesign, mentor peer leads, scale effective practices

2.2: ADJUNCT TEACHING FELLOW ROLE DESCRIPTION

Purpose

Lead a **focused, semester- or year-long improvement project** addressing a concrete pedagogical or curricular challenge in a course, program, or student population. Teaching fellows test innovations, document results, and share findings with colleagues, making their work visible and influential.

Project Examples

- Design and pilot **multilingual scaffolds** in gateway composition courses (sentence frames, translated models, translanguaging prompts)
- Redesign **discussion forums** in online sections to increase engagement and belonging
- Create a **common first-week sequence** across sections of an introductory course that builds community and trauma-informed routines

- Develop **low-stakes formative assessment routines** and test their effect on student confidence
- Pilot a **revision/resubmission process** to support student growth and reduce grade anxiety
- Build a **resource guide** on inclusive teaching for adjunct colleagues in a discipline

Key Responsibilities

Project Design & Implementation (50% of role)

- **Define a clear, answerable question:** e.g., "What happens to student engagement when we add sentence frames to discussion prompts?" or "How does a community-building first week affect sense of belonging?"
- **Implement the innovation** in your own course or a small number of sections (2–3 is ideal)
- **Collect simple evidence:** student survey responses, assignment submission/completion rates, brief reflective comments, engagement metrics, or qualitative observations
- **Document the process** with notes on what worked, what was unexpected, and what you would adjust next time

Facilitation & Peer Learning (30% of role)

- **Facilitate 2–3 peer workshops or learning sessions** where colleagues see the innovation in action, analyze student work, and rehearse using the new practice

- **Share artifacts:** models, templates, rubrics, discussion prompts, or handouts that peers can adapt for their own courses
- **Mentor interested colleagues** who want to pilot the innovation in their sections

Presentation & Documentation (20% of role)

- **Present findings** to the department, program, or faculty development group (15–20 minutes, followed by Q&A)
- **Create a brief written summary** (2–3 pages) with: question, methods, key findings, lessons learned, and recommendations
- **Optional:** Co-present at a regional or state conference (with travel support)

Time & Compensation

- **Stipend:** \$1,500–\$2,500 per project (for a semester-long or year-long fellowship), OR
- **Course release:** 1 course per semester while project is active, OR
- **Hourly pay:** \$25–\$35/hour for project work (10–15 hours per week for a semester)
- **Professional development budget:** \$500–\$1,000 for conference travel, research, or materials
- **Recognition:** Acknowledgment in department communications, credentials for resume/CV, featured presentation at campus teaching event

Timeline Example (One-Semester Fellowship)

Week 1–2: Define question, design project, set up data collection

Week 3–12: Implement innovation, collect evidence, iterate as needed

Week 13: Analyze results, prepare presentation and written summary

Week 14–15: Facilitate peer workshop and present findings

Success Indicators

- ✓ Clear documentation of innovation and findings
- ✓ 70%+ of workshop participants report learning something they can use
- ✓ 3+ colleagues commit to piloting the innovation next term
- ✓ Fellow reports increased sense of professional agency and contributions
- ✓ Findings inform departmental or program-level decisions (e.g., included in PD plan, cited in curriculum revision)

Types of Fellows

Single-Project Fellow (Semester-long)

Focus on one course or innovation. Lighter lift, faster results, good entry point.

Program Fellow (Year-long)

Lead 2–3 interconnected projects within a program (e.g., redesigning gateway sequence, building interdisciplinary connections). Deeper impact, more compensation.

Equity Fellow

Specifically focused on closing equity gaps (DFW rates, retention, outcomes by race/ethnicity or language background). Involves data analysis, departmental collaboration, and institutional visibility.

2.3: ADJUNCT GOVERNANCE REPRESENTATIVE ROLE DESCRIPTION

Purpose

Ensure contingent faculty perspectives are present and heard in key decision-making bodies (Academic Senate, curriculum committees, budget/planning committees, DEI councils, etc.), and serve as a bridge so decisions and their rationales are communicated back to adjunct colleagues.

Key Responsibilities

Committee Participation (50% of role)

- **Attend specified committees** consistently (e.g., Teaching & Learning, Curriculum, Policy, Assessment Committees, typically 6–12 meetings per year)
- **Come prepared:** review agendas and materials; think through how decisions affect adjunct colleagues and students
- **Speak and vote:** not just attend, but actively participate in deliberation and decision-making
- **Connect to ground-level reality:** bring classroom and adjunct perspectives into discussions dominated by administrative or full-time perspectives

Adjunct Constituency Communication (40% of role)

- **Before meetings:** briefly poll adjunct colleagues or social media groups to gather input on upcoming agenda items
- **After meetings:** send concise, plain-language summaries to adjunct faculty explaining:
 - What was decided
 - Why the decision was made
 - How it affects teaching, students, or working conditions
 - What comes next
- **Invite questions and feedback** so adjunct voices continue to influence decisions
- **Create a simple feedback form or email template** so colleagues can share concerns easily

Advocacy & Problem-Solving (10% of role)

- **Advocate for policies that address adjunct stability and inclusion:**
 - Transparent scheduling and assignment processes
 - Equitable compensation for service work
 - Professional development access
 - Governance inclusion beyond tokenistic roles

- **Problem-solve** when adjunct concerns arise; escalate to department chair or union when necessary
- **Track patterns:** if multiple colleagues raise the same concern, document it and bring it to committee attention

Time & Compensation

- **Meeting stipend:** \$30–\$50 per committee meeting attended (total: \$500–\$1,000 per year), OR
- **Hourly pay:** \$25–\$35/hour for meeting time plus prep and communication, OR
- **Course credit:** 1 credit per term, OR
- **Professional development fund:** \$300–\$500 annually for governance training or professional development

Desired Qualifications

- **Strong communication skills** (both listening and clear writing)
- **Interest in institutional dynamics** and how decisions are made
- **Respect for multiple perspectives** and ability to hear full complexity of issues
- **Willingness to represent adjunct interests** even when it is not popular
- **Comfort with public speaking** in meetings
- **Ability to ask clarifying questions** without being combative

Selection Process

- **Nominations and/or elections** from adjunct colleagues (e.g., through department email, adjunct caucus, or union)
- **Term:** typically 1–2 years, renewable
- **Multiple representatives:** if committee work is extensive, consider 2 reps per major committee so no one is overextended

Success Indicators

- ✓ Adjuncts report feeling more informed about institutional decisions
- ✓ Governance bodies explicitly acknowledge adjunct rep contributions
- ✓ At least one policy change addressing adjunct concerns is enacted per year
- ✓ Adjunct participation in governance-related surveys increases
- ✓ Rep reports reduced isolation and increased sense of agency

Sample Communication Protocol

After each committee meeting:

Subject: [Committee Name] Meeting Recap – [Date]

Hi colleagues,

Here's what happened at yesterday's [committee] meeting:

Decision made: [Concise description]

Why: [Rationale]

How it affects us: [Concrete implications for adjunct teaching or working conditions]

What happens next: [Timeline]

Questions? Reply to this email or message me.

[Name]

Adjunct Governance Representative

2.4: COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE / MENTORING CIRCLE FACILITATION GUIDE

What Is a Community of Practice?

A group of 6–12 faculty (mix of adjunct and full-time) teaching the same or related courses who meet regularly (every 2 weeks, monthly, or quarterly) to:

- **Examine student work together** and discuss what it reveals
- **Share strategies** and teaching challenges in a collaborative, non-judgmental space
- **Plan lessons and assignments** as a group, tapping collective expertise
- **Document and codify** effective practices into shared resources (repositories, rubrics, templates)
- **Build belonging** and reduce the isolation of teaching

Research shows that communities of practice:

- Reduce burnout and professional isolation for adjunct faculty
- Increase instructional coherence when faculty share language, rubrics, and expectations
- Speed adoption of new practices because colleagues design and test them together
- Create sustainable change because relationships and shared norms outlast formal initiatives

Getting Started: The Five-Meeting Cycle

Meeting 1: Launch & Visioning (60 minutes)

Purpose: Build trust, clarify shared purpose, set norms

Agenda:

- **Check-in (5 min):** Go around: name, what course you teach, one thing you love about teaching it
- **Vision (10 min):** Facilitator shares the vision: "We're here to learn together, share strategies, and support each other's teaching"
- **Norms (15 min):** Group co-creates 3–5 norms (e.g., "what's said here stays here"; "all ideas welcome"; "no hierarchy—we're peers"; "show up for each other")
- **Focus course & key question (20 min):** Agree on:
 - Which course(s) the group will focus on (ideally, all teach the same course)
 - One concrete challenge or goal for the group (e.g., "How do we support multilingual writers?" "How do we design a feedback routine that students actually use?")
- **Meeting cadence (10 min):** Agree on when to meet (every 2 weeks? monthly?) and format (in-person, Zoom, hybrid?)

Outputs:

- Agreed norms (post them in your shared space)
- Confirmed meeting calendar
- Shared focus question

Meetings 2–4: Alternating "Case Clinic" and "Planning" Sessions

Pattern A: Case Clinic (60 minutes)

One person brings a real classroom problem. The group thinks through it together.

Agenda:

- **Check-in (5 min):** Quick personal update, mood, one teaching win from the past two weeks
- **Case presentation (10 min):** One person shares a concrete problem (with anonymized student context)
 - *Example:* "My students aren't engaging in discussion forums. Threads die after one post."
 - *Example:* "Half my class understands the assignment; the other half is confused, and I cannot figure out why my explanation is not landing."
- **Artifact review (10 min):** If possible, group reviews:
 - The assignment prompt
 - A few anonymized student posts or submissions
 - The feedback the presenter gave
- **Brainstorm solutions (20 min):** Group suggests 3–5 concrete strategies to try
 - *Example:* Add sentence frames so students know how to respond to peers
 - *Example:* Rewrite the prompt to be shorter and more specific
 - *Example:* Show a model discussion before asking students to contribute

- **Commitment (10 min):** Presenter picks 1–2 strategies to try before the next meeting and commits to reporting back
- **Close-out (5 min):** Quick reflection: "What resonated with you?" "What will you try in your own class?"

Outputs:

- Presenter has 1–2 strategies to implement
 - Group learned something about a shared challenge
 - Next meeting: presenter reports what happened
-

Pattern B: Planning Session (60 minutes)

The group co-designs or refines an assignment, rubric, or instructional sequence for the next unit.

Agenda:

- **Check-in (5 min):** Quick update on how last session's commitments went (if a case clinic was last meeting)
- **Identify upcoming unit (10 min):** Which unit or assignment are we designing/refining?
 - *Example:* The first major essay in composition
 - *Example:* The first lab report in biology
 - *Example:* Problem-solving in introductory algebra
- **Existing prompt/assignment review (10 min):** Look at the current version
 - What works?
 - Where do students get confused?
 - What is missing?

- **Co-design or revise (25 min):** Group drafts or refines:
 - Prompt (make it student-friendly, clear, and equitable)
 - Rubric (align with course outcomes; use language students understand)
 - Supports (scaffolds for multilingual students, first-gen learners, etc.)
- **Try it & report back (10 min):** Agree that each person will use the revised version and report on what students did
- **Close (5 min):** Celebrate the work; clarify next steps

Outputs:

- A revised, collectively-designed assignment/rubric
- Shared agreement to test it and report back
- Added to the shared repository for future use

Meeting 5: Pause, Reflect, Plan Forward (60 minutes)

After 4–5 meetings, pause to assess and adjust.

Agenda:

- **Pulse check (20 min):** Quick go-round
 - Is this helpful?
 - Are we meeting your needs?
 - What should we keep? What should we change?
- **Data (10 min):** If you have been collecting it:
 - Student engagement?

- Assignment quality?
- Your own sense of coherence or confidence?
- **Adjust norms/format/focus as needed (15 min):**
 - Do we meet more or less often?
 - Do we focus on different assignments or courses?
 - Do we need sub-groups?
- **Celebrate (10 min):** Acknowledge what is working, changes people see, and peer support that has emerged
- **Plan next cycle (5 min):** Confirm next 4 meetings and focus topics

Outputs:

- Adjusted norms/cadence based on group feedback
 - Renewed energy and commitment
-

Facilitation Tips (For Adjunct and Full-Time Facilitators)

Before Meetings

- **Send agenda 3 days in advance** so people can prepare (especially if you are doing a case clinic)
- **Remind people the day before** (one simple email: "See you tomorrow at 3 p.m. in room X, Teams, Zoom. Agenda: [one line]")
- **Bring simple supplies (if in-person):** snacks, coffee, name placards
- **Test technology** if meeting hybrid/remote

During Meetings

- **Start on time, end on time.** Respect people's schedules (many adjuncts are juggling multiple jobs)
- **Use a talking stick or norms** to manage air time (e.g., "Let's hear from people who have not spoken yet")
- **Ask open questions:** "What do you notice in this student work?" rather than "Do not you think the student misunderstood?"
- **Honor multiple perspectives:** "Those are two different approaches; let us sit with both"
- **Watch for hierarchy:** Full-time faculty sometimes dominate. Actively invite adjunct voices: "I have not heard from you yet—what is your take?"
- **Take brief notes** (one-person job) so you can document decisions, strategies, and follow-ups

After Meetings

- **Send a 2–3 sentence recap** within a day:
 - "Yesterday we discussed [topic]. Key idea: [one thing]. Next meeting: [date/focus]"
- **Flag action items:** who is trying what, and when will you report back?
- **Add artifacts to repository** (assignment, rubric, strategy notes)
- **Check in with anyone who was quiet:** "I wanted to hear more from you. Everything okay?"

When Things Get Stuck

Low attendance: Meet individually with missing folks. Ask what they need. Maybe the time does not work. Maybe they do not see the value yet. Fix it.

Hierarchy sneaking in: Gently name it. "I notice we are mostly hearing from full-time folks. Let us pause and get adjunct perspectives." Make it normal, not a call-out.

Conflict: Do not avoid it. Say, "I hear two different approaches here. Let us talk about what they are each trying to do." Use interest-based negotiation: what is underneath the position?

Dominance by one person: Kindly redirect. "Thanks for that thought. Let us hear what others think." Then call on someone quieter.

Compensation & Sustainability

For facilitators: \$500–\$1,000 per year (or 1 course credit per term)

For participants: Can be unpaid if meetings are during work hours and clearly valued, OR \$15–\$25 per meeting if asking participation outside of work time

Room/resources: Secure a consistent space. Bring coffee and light snacks. Tech support if remote.

Make it sustainable:

- Start with **one community** (one course or program)
- **Keep it small** (6–10 people—larger groups splinter)
- **Invest in a facilitator** who has a bit of release time

- **Do not add to meeting overload:** replace something, do not add on
- **Celebrate it:** feature members' work in department communications, share successes with leadership

2.5: ADJUNCT LEADERSHIP FELLOWS PROGRAM TEMPLATE

Program Overview

An intentional, year-long (or semester-long) program that cultivates 3–5 adjunct leaders per cohort. Fellows engage in structured project work, peer mentoring, and professional development, emerging as visible leaders in teaching, curriculum, and program improvement.

Program Goals

- **Develop leadership capacity** among adjunct faculty
- **Create space for adjunct expertise to influence institutional decisions**
- **Build peer networks** that reduce isolation and create lasting professional relationships
- **Test and scale innovations** in teaching and curriculum
- **Model what distributed leadership looks like** in practice

Timeline: Year-Long Cohort Model

Summer (Before Year Begins): Recruitment & Orientation

Recruit 3–5 fellows through:

- Nomination by department chair or colleagues
- Application process (simple 2-page form asking: "What teaching challenge do you want to tackle? What would leadership look like to you?")
- Invitation from union or adjunct caucus
- Advertise as: "Leadership opportunity. Stipend. Professional development. Make change."

Orientation (half-day or 2–3 hour session):

- Welcome & vision of program
- Overview of each fellow's project focus
- Facilitation and professional development skills workshop
- Peer introductions; establish accountability partners
- Confirm time commitment, compensation, support

Fall Semester: Project Design & Launch**Month 1: Clarify Your Project**

- Fellow articulates the question/goal (e.g., "How can we support multilingual writers in gateway composition?" or "How do we create a welcoming first-week experience?")
- Check it for clarity, feasibility, and alignment with institutional priorities
- Identify 2–3 colleagues who will be "critical friends" (peer reviewers/supporters)
- Create a simple project plan: timeline, methods, success metrics

Months 2–4: Implement, Iterate, Collect Evidence

- Fellow tests innovation in own course(s)
- Gathers simple data: student feedback, assignment outcomes, engagement metrics, or observational notes
- Meets monthly with program coordinator for check-ins, problem-solving, and peer learning
- Shares progress with accountability partners for feedback and encouragement

Fall Capstone: Share & Celebrate

- Fellows present 15-minute progress update to the broader faculty (not just staff)
- Celebrate what is underway
- Invite questions and interest from colleagues who might want to join next phase

Spring Semester: Deepen, Document, Share

Months 5–7: Finalize & Scale

- Fellows complete projects and analyze results
- Create brief written summary (2–3 pages):
 - What was the question?
 - What did you do?
 - What did you learn?
 - What would you do differently?
 - What can others use?
- Document artifacts: assignment prompts, rubrics, feedback templates, discussion protocols
- Facilitate 1–2 peer learning sessions where colleagues explore the innovation

Month 8: Public Presentation & Celebration

- Fellows present findings to department, program, or full faculty
- Create a brief video or podcast snippet (2–3 minutes) on findings
- Host a celebration with leadership, peers, and family
- Acknowledge fellows' contributions publicly and in department communications

Throughout: Peer Support & Professional Development

Monthly cohort meetings (1.5 hours):

- Each fellow briefly shares progress and a challenge
- Group brainstorms and problem-solves
- Mini-lesson or discussion on leadership, facilitation, or pedagogy
- Accountability partners offer specific feedback and support

Professional development (choose 1–2 per year):

- Webinar on facilitating peer learning
- Workshop on assessment and data literacy
- Conference attendance (if project involves presentation)
- Coaching session on public speaking or writing

Mentoring:

- Each fellow is paired with an experienced mentor (faculty developer, department chair, or experienced adjunct leader)
 - Monthly 30-minute check-in on professional growth, challenges, and support needed
-

Program Structure & Roles

Program Coordinator (0.5 FTE or 1 course release)

- Recruit and orient fellows
- Convene monthly cohort meetings
- Provide check-ins, problem-solving, and support

- Connect fellows to resources and mentoring
- Document and share findings
- Evaluate program annually

Mentor for Each Fellow (voluntarily or with modest compensation)

- Experienced faculty (adjunct or full-time) who has led similar work
- Meet monthly with fellow for encouragement, advice, and accountability
- Help troubleshoot challenges
- Offer writing or presentation feedback
- Model leadership in action

Program Advisory Group (optional, meets 2–3 times per year)

- Department chair, faculty developer, and 1–2 adjunct leaders from prior cohorts
 - Provide oversight and guidance
 - Help connect fellows' work to institutional priorities
 - Celebrate and publicize findings
-

Sample Project Focuses

Teaching & Pedagogy

- "How do we support multilingual writers in composition courses?"
- "What happens when we design with trauma-informed principles in mind?"
- "How can we increase engagement in online discussion?"

Curriculum & Program Design

- "How can we redesign the first-year experience to build belonging?"
- "How do we integrate equity into our assessment practices?"
- "What does an accelerated pathway in math look like?"

Student Support & Equity

- "How do we identify at-risk students earlier and provide proactive support?"
- "How can we reduce DFW rates in gateway courses?"
- "How can we better serve working, first-generation students?"

Institutional Change

- "How do we build a community of practice in our discipline?"
 - "What does a mentoring program for adjuncts look like?"
 - "How can we make professional development more responsive to adjunct needs?"
-

Compensation & Resources

Per fellow, per year:

- **Stipend:** \$3,000–\$5,000, OR course release (1–1.5 courses), OR
- **Hourly:** \$25–\$35/hour for 10–15 hours per week during project phase
- **Professional development budget:** \$500–\$750 (conferences, books, courses, materials)
- **Resources:** access to data, LMS support, copyediting or design help, tech tools
- **Recognition:** credentials for CV, public acknowledgment, featured article or video

Mentor compensation (optional):

- \$300–\$500 per fellow mentored, OR

- Course credit (0.25–0.5 course per mentee)

Program coordinator:

- 0.5 FTE dedicated staff, OR 1 course release per semester, OR stipend of \$3,000–\$5,000
-

Measuring Success

Year 1:

- ✓ 3–5 fellows recruited and supported
- ✓ Clear projects defined and implemented
- ✓ 70%+ completion rate
- ✓ Fellows report increased sense of agency and belonging
- ✓ Findings shared publicly with faculty

Year 2:

- ✓ Prior-year fellows mentor new cohort
- ✓ At least 2 innovations from fellows are adopted college-wide or tested in additional sections
- ✓ Adjunct representation in institutional conversations increases
- ✓ Student outcomes in fellows' focus areas show improvement (or are on trajectory)

Longitudinal:

- ✓ Fellows become visible leaders, taking on governance roles, presenting at conferences, advancing professionally
- ✓ Program becomes an expected pathway for adjunct leadership
- ✓ Culture shift: adjuncts are seen as leaders, not peripheral labor

✓ Innovations compound: multiple cohorts build on each other's work

2.6: PULSE SURVEY – VOICE, BELONGING & PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Purpose

A brief, recurring survey (quarterly or semi-annually) to assess whether adjuncts are experiencing increased voice, belonging, and professional learning. Used to adjust structures and celebrate progress.

Administration

- **Format:** 7 questions, takes 3–5 minutes; can be paper, Google Form, or Qualtrics
 - **Frequency:** Every 4–6 months (at end of fall, spring, and summer, or quarterly)
 - **Distribution:** All adjunct faculty, especially those in governance roles, communities of practice, or leadership programs
 - **Anonymity:** Assure respondents that data is aggregated and no individual responses will be identified
 - **Response goal:** 60%+ participation
-

Survey Questions

1. I feel informed about decisions that affect my teaching and working conditions.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

[If "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree"]: What information would be most helpful?

2. I have at least one place or group where my ideas about teaching and students are heard and valued.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

[If "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree"]: What kind of space would help?

3. In the past 4 months, I have used something from professional development (workshop, community of practice, mentoring) in my teaching.

- No
- Yes, a little
- Yes, significantly

[If "Yes"]: What was it? How did it go?

4. I feel connected to my colleagues and less isolated in my teaching.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Brief comment (optional):

5. This institution values adjunct faculty contributions.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

What would show that we value you?

6. I would be interested in a micro-leadership role (course lead, teaching fellow, governance representative, mentoring circle facilitator) if it were offered.

- No
- Maybe / Tell me more
- Yes

If yes, what kind of role interests you?

7. Any other comments about your experience as an adjunct or ideas for improvement?

Using the Data

Quarterly Check-in with Cohort Leaders:

- Review aggregate data
- Identify patterns (e.g., "Voice has increased in governance; isolation remains high in [program]")
- Celebrate gains
- Identify next actions

Annual Report:

- Share results with all adjunct faculty and leadership
- Compare year-over-year (if you have been doing this longitudinally)
- Highlight improvements and areas for focus
- Show that feedback is heard and acted upon

Specific Use Cases:

- **If voice is low:** Audit governance structures; invite more adjuncts to committees; ensure compensation

- **If isolation is high:** Launch more communities of practice; create mentoring circles
 - **If PD uptake is low:** Ask what format or content would help; offer more options
 - **If leadership interest is high:** Create more micro-leadership roles; expand fellows program
-

Sample Results Dashboard (Quarterly)

Fall 2024 Adjunct Voice & Belonging Pulse Survey

Respondents: 42 of 65 adjunct faculty (65%)

VOICE: "I feel informed about decisions affecting my teaching"

- Strongly Agree: 38%
- Agree: 29%
- Neutral: 19%
- Disagree: 10%
- Strongly Disagree: 4%
- → 67% feel informed (up from 52% in Spring 2024)
- → Key feedback: "More transparency about hiring decisions" (mentioned 3x)

BELONGING: "I have a place where my ideas are heard"

- Strongly Agree: 45%
- Agree: 26%
- Neutral: 17%
- Disagree: 7%

- Strongly Disagree: 5%
- → 71% report being heard (up from 58% in Spring 2024)
- → Mentoring circles are cited as key space for this

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING: "I used something from PD in my teaching"

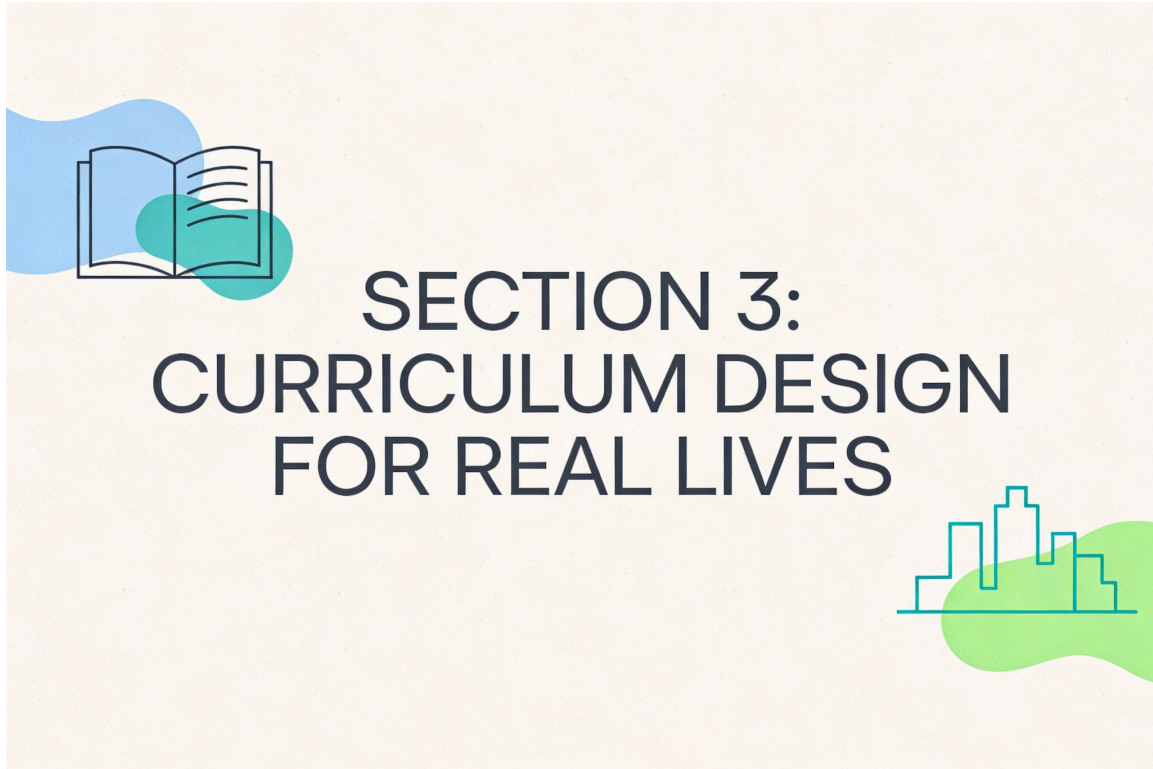
- Yes, significantly: 29%
- Yes, a little: 38%
- No: 33%
- → 67% using PD (up from 49% in Spring 2024)
- → Communities of practice cited more than workshops

LEADERSHIP INTEREST: "Interested in micro-leadership role?"

- Yes: 31% (13 faculty)
- Maybe: 43% (18 faculty)
- No: 26% (11 faculty)
- → Most interest in course lead (6), teaching fellow (5), mentoring (7)
- → Gap: fellowship program can only accommodate 3–5 per year

NEXT ACTIONS:

- → Create waiting list for leadership roles; expand program
- → Continue governance access work (effects showing!)
- → Listen to hiring transparency feedback; work with HR/admin* For each domain, check the current level of adjunct involvement and note compensation.



Introduction to Curriculum Design for Real Lives

Curriculum in community colleges must be designed not for an imagined traditional student, but for the students who are actually in the room: multilingual learners, working adults, caregivers, first-generation students, and returning learners navigating complex lives. Research on asset-based and culturally responsive teaching demonstrates that when curricula are designed with attention to students' linguistic, cultural, and economic identities, they both honor student strengths and improve persistence and success.

This section translates theoretical frameworks, Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005), critical language awareness, and culturally responsive teaching, into concrete curriculum design tools that departments and faculty can use immediately. It assumes that adjuncts and

full-time faculty should co-author learning pathways in gateway and high-impact courses, and that sustainable curriculum design must reflect students' identities, time constraints, and actual transfer or employment trajectories.

The tools in this section position curricular work as shared, iterative work rather than a fixed product designed once and then implemented. They also acknowledge that meaningful curriculum change requires adjunct participation from the beginning, not as an afterthought once full-time faculty have decided direction. When adjuncts are involved in curriculum design and decision-making from the start, they bring classroom expertise that strengthens course coherence, equity, and student success.

Why Curriculum Design for Real Lives Matters: The Research

Research on culturally responsive teaching, asset-based pedagogy, and curriculum design shows that **when courses are structured around student strengths, transparent expectations, and realistic time commitments, students persist longer, succeed at higher rates, and feel valued as members of the academic community.**

When curriculum is designed with students' real lives in mind:

- **Persistence and completion increase.** Students who see their identities and circumstances reflected in courses, and who encounter transparent expectations and flexible policies, are more likely to persist through difficulty.
- **Equity gaps narrow.** Curriculum designed with Community Cultural Wealth principles names students' linguistic, cultural, and experiential assets, not only deficits. This

reframing improves outcomes for multilingual, first-generation, and working-adult students.

- **Coherence strengthens across sections.** When adjuncts and full-time faculty teaching the same course align expectations, assignments, and language, students encounter consistency. This alignment is especially important in gateway courses where coordination prevents confusion and builds confidence.
- **Language justice advances.** Critical language awareness, teaching students to understand the relationship between language, power, and identity, supports multilingual students in navigating academic English while honoring their full linguistic repertoires.
- **Hidden curriculum becomes visible.** Many struggling students do not fail because they cannot do the work; they fail because they have not decoded the unspoken rules of academic success. Transparent syllabi, assignment rationales, and navigation strategies level this playing field.
- **Adjunct expertise influences institutional direction.** When adjuncts participate in curriculum design, their ground-level knowledge about student needs, barriers, and effective practices reaches decision-makers. This integration of adjunct voice improves both curriculum quality and adjunct sense of professional agency.

Yet most curriculum design processes exclude adjuncts or include them only in implementation, after key decisions are locked in place. Curriculum revision is often:

- **Designed by full-time faculty in isolation**, without input from adjuncts who teach the course daily.
- **Top-down**, handed down as a mandate rather than a shared process.

- **Periodic and rare**, happening only when accreditation requires it, not as an ongoing cycle of improvement.
 - **Disconnected from equity data**, without intentional analysis of DFW rates, completion, or outcomes disaggregated by race/ethnicity or language background.
 - **Assumed to implement itself**, without structures for feedback, adjustment, or celebration when faculty change practice successfully.
-

What This Section Helps You Do

- **Audit existing courses and programs** for alignment with Community Cultural Wealth, asset-based pedagogy, and culturally responsive teaching principles using a practical checklist.
 - **Redesign gateway courses** (composition, introductory math, psychology, etc.) with attention to students' identities, actual time constraints, language backgrounds, and clear pathways to transfer or employment.
 - **Make expectations, language, and navigation strategies transparent** so students are not left to decode hidden academic rules on their own.
 - **Ensure adjunct participation in curriculum design** from the beginning, documenting their input and creating feedback loops so their expertise continuously shapes curriculum improvement.
-

Tools You Will Find Here

3.1 Equity-Centered Curriculum Design Checklist

A practical checklist to review syllabi, assignments, readings, and assessments for alignment with Community Cultural Wealth, critical language awareness, and culturally responsive teaching. Use in department or community-of-practice meetings to audit one course at a time.

3.2 Gateway Course Redesign Template

A step-by-step template for redesigning high-enrollment, high-stakes courses around student assets, multiple modalities, and clearly mapped pathways to next courses or employment. Includes specific guidance on first-week design, assignment scaffolds, and transparent criteria.

3.3 Adjunct Participation & Feedback Log for Curriculum Work

A simple structure to document adjunct participation in curriculum decisions, track their input over time, and maintain ongoing feedback loops that inform future revisions. This log creates accountability and visibility for adjunct contributions.

How These Tools Work Together

The checklist helps you see a course's current alignment with equity and asset-based principles. The redesign template provides a structured process for improvement, with explicit roles for adjuncts. The participation log ensures that adjunct expertise becomes part of the institutional record and shapes future iterations.

Used together with Section 1 governance tools and Section 2 leadership roles, these curriculum tools create a complete system: governance structures ensure adjuncts have a formal voice in institutional decisions; micro-leadership roles distribute expertise

throughout the college; and curriculum design processes ensure that this expertise directly influences what and how students learn.

Getting Started

Choose one entry point:

- If you want to **audit a course or program for equity alignment**, start with Tool 3.1 (Equity-Centered Curriculum Design Checklist).
- If you want to **redesign a gateway course**, use Tool 3.2 (Gateway Course Redesign Template).
- If you want to **create sustainable feedback loops** with adjuncts on curriculum, use Tool 3.3 (Adjunct Participation & Feedback Log).

Start with one course. Include adjuncts from the beginning. Use the checklist or template to structure your work. Document decisions and feedback. Let it grow.

SECTION 3: CURRICULUM DESIGN

The Problem

Gateway courses are often designed by full-time faculty or curriculum committees without deep input from adjuncts who teach them. The result: curriculum disconnected from student reality.

The solution: adjunct-led curriculum redesign.

Where to Start: Gateway Course Redesign Team

Timing: 2–3 hour kickoff meeting; ongoing work over 4–6 weeks

Who should facilitate: A department chair or curriculum leader, with an adjunct co-facilitator

Who should join: All faculty teaching a gateway course (especially mix of adjunct and full-time)

What you'll need:

- Toolkit 3 (Curriculum Design for Real Lives)
- Current course outline and syllabus
- Student demographic data (enrollment, DFW rates, success by modality)
- Facilitator agenda (see below)

Facilitator's Language (Framing):

"We're redesigning [Course Name] because data shows we can do better. We have smart adjuncts teaching 80% of sections. They know what students struggle with, what works, what our students bring. THIS conversation needs their expertise. We're not here to 'fix' the adjuncts. We're here to use what you know to make the course better for students AND teachers."

Meeting Agenda: Curriculum Redesign Kickoff (120 minutes)

0–10 min: Welcome & Goal

- "By the end of today, we'll map what we want to change and who'll do the work."
- "This is a working meeting. We'll get messy, be honest, and commit to something specific."

10–25 min: Student Reality Check

- Show: enrollment data, DFW rates, completion rates, demographic info
- Ask: "Who are our students? What's their life like?"
- Adjuncts speak: "Here's what I see in my classroom. [Examples]"
- Full-time faculty listen, ask questions

25–45 min: What's Working & What's Not

- "What about the current course design serves students well?"
- "What frustrates you? What don't students understand? Where do they get stuck?"
- Record on board or document

45–70 min: Design Thinking

- Pick ONE area to redesign (e.g., critical thinking assignments, multilingual support, assessment)
- Use Toolkit 3 prompts:
 - "How can we make this more accessible without lowering rigor?"
 - "How can we honor student assets (home languages, prior knowledge, community expertise)?"

- "How can we reduce unintended barriers (reading load, prerequisite knowledge, cultural references)?"

70–100 min: Teamwork & Timelines

- "Who will lead the redesign of [assignment/section/assessment]?"
- Volunteer or recruit. Adjuncts should lead at least 1–2 pieces.
- Set dates: "We meet again in [2 weeks] to share drafts."
- Offer: "I'm available to support. Bring questions."

100–120 min: Closing & Commitment

- "What are you taking away?"
- "What commitments are you making?"
- "What support do you need?"

Facilitator Tips: Centering Adjunct Expertise

Challenge: *Full-time faculty dismiss adjunct ideas: "That's not rigorous enough" or "We tried that before."*

Response:

- Interrupt gently: "I hear you. AND let's hear what happened in [adjunct name]'s section. [Adjunct], can you tell us more?"
- Make space: "When multiple instructors are teaching the same course, their diverse approaches strengthen it. Let's figure out what works across sections."
- Validate: "That's a practical solution. Thank you for thinking about implementation."

Challenge: *Adjuncts are quiet, assuming full-time faculty will decide.*

Response:

- Direct invitation: "[Name], you teach two sections of this course. What would make a difference for your students?"
- Affirmation: "Your students' success depends partly on what happens in this course. Your voice matters in redesigning it."
- Follow-up: If someone doesn't speak in the meeting, reach out 1-on-1. "I want to hear your thoughts. What would you change?"

Moving Forward: Iterating the Redesign

Weeks 1–2:

- Gather feedback from the full redesign team
- Circulate drafts
- Ask: "Does this work? What's missing?"

Weeks 3–4:

- Adjuncts pilot new assignments or approaches with their students
- Collect student feedback (quick surveys, open-ended responses)
- Note what works and what needs tweaking

Week 5:

- Debrief and finalize

- "What did you learn from piloting?"
- Make final adjustments
- Document changes in course outline

Semester after:

- Assess impact
- Compare DFW rates, completion, student feedback
- Use Toolkit 5 (Assessment) to interpret results
- Plan next iteration

SECTION 3 TOOLS

3.1: EQUITY-CENTERED CURRICULUM DESIGN CHECKLIST

Purpose

Support faculty teams in reviewing existing courses and programs for alignment with Community Cultural Wealth, asset-based pedagogy, critical language awareness, and culturally responsive teaching. This checklist is formative, designed to identify next steps and celebrate progress, not to evaluate individual faculty members.

How to Use This Checklist

- Use in department or community-of-practice meetings to review one course at a time.
- Invite adjuncts who regularly teach the course to co-lead the review; their insights are essential.
- Work through the checklist as a collaborative conversation, not a checklist to be checked off silently.
- Rate each item as: **Not Yet** / **Emerging** / **Consistent** / **Strong** and note specific evidence.
- Identify 2–3 priority changes to make in the next 1–2 terms.
- Revisit the checklist annually as part of program review.

Part A: Who Is This Curriculum Built For?

Student Asset Recognition and Representation

- Course outcomes explicitly reflect the goals and realities of multilingual, first-generation, returning, and working-adult students (e.g., emphasis on transfer skills, workplace communication, civic engagement, language and identity navigation).
- Examples, case studies, readings, and course materials represent students' communities, languages, and ways of knowing as sources of **strength**, drawing explicitly on Community Cultural Wealth frameworks.
- The syllabus explicitly invites students to bring their full identities, experiences, and linguistic repertoires to the course, framing multilingualism and diverse prior schooling as assets rather than deficits.

Realistic Time and Flexibility Expectations

- Time expectations (hours per week for reading, projects, group work, revision) are realistic for students with jobs, caregiving responsibilities, long commutes, and limited technology access.
- The syllabus includes policies that show flexibility and humanity (grace periods, late-work options, alternative assignment formats) while maintaining clear, communicated boundaries and deadlines.
- Group work and collaborative assignments include options for asynchronous participation and clear role descriptions so all students can engage fully.

Part B: Language, Power, and Critical Awareness

Multilingual and Translanguaging Support

- Assignments explicitly make room for students' full linguistic repertoires code-meshing, translanguaging, and bilingual or multilingual resources are welcomed, not penalized.
- The course includes language examples from students' communities and cultures, not only academic English.
- Feedback on student writing distinguishes between errors that impede meaning and stylistic preferences; instructors coach students to navigate dominant norms strategically while honoring their home languages and varieties.

Critical Language Awareness

- The course explicitly teaches critical language awareness: students examine how language, power, and identity intersect in academic and professional settings.
- Students analyze whose voices, languages, and ways of knowing are centered in course texts; they name and question narratives that render some groups invisible or marginalized.
- Where relevant, the course helps students understand the history and social context of "standard" English and the languages/varieties they bring, positioning all language varieties as legitimate.

Grading and Assessment Language

- Rubrics and grading criteria are written in clear, student-friendly language, avoiding jargon or assumptions about prior knowledge.
- Grading criteria prioritize meaning and clarity over surface-level "correctness" when evaluating multilingual writers.

- Feedback explicitly connects student work to learning outcomes and includes specific strategies for revision and improvement, not only criticism.

Part C: Transparency and Navigation

Clear Expectations and Syllabus Design

- Major assignments include clear purpose, audience, task, and success criteria, written in accessible language with examples and models.
- The syllabus explicitly teaches students how to succeed in the course: where to go for help, how to use office hours, what revision looks like, what exemplary work looks like, how to manage time effectively.
- Assessment methods and grading are clearly explained; students know not only what the grade means but also how to earn it through specific, replicable actions.

Mapped Pathways

- The course includes a visual map or narrative explaining how each unit and major assignment connects to program outcomes, transfer expectations, or workplace competencies.
- The syllabus shows how this course connects to the next course in a sequence or to degree requirements, so students understand the larger curricular architecture.
- First-semester courses explicitly map what students will be ready for next and how to get there, reducing mystery and building agency.

De-Coded Academic Culture

- The syllabus includes a "how to navigate this class" section that makes visible what many students must guess: when to ask for help, how to format work, what "professional communication" looks like in academic contexts, when collaboration is expected versus when individual work is required.
- The course includes explicit instruction on academic conventions relevant to the discipline (how biologists write lab reports, how historians use evidence, how mathematicians explain problem-solving).

Part D: Assessment and Flexibility

Multiple Modalities and Low-Stakes Practice

- The course uses multiple ways for students to demonstrate learning: projects, reflections, presentations, collaborative work, exams, portfolios, written and oral forms.
- Low-stakes practice and revision opportunities are built into early units so students can try, fail, get feedback, and improve before stakes are high.
- Students have at least one opportunity to revise a major assignment and resubmit based on feedback, signaling that growth is expected and valued.

Equity-Minded Policies

- Policies allow reasonable flexibility (grace periods without grade penalty, alternative assignment formats, late-work options) while maintaining clear, communicated boundaries.

- The course does not penalize students for circumstances often beyond their control (technology access, work schedules, caregiving, health).
- Attendance and participation are structured to include multiple ways to be present and engaged (synchronous and asynchronous options, various modalities of participation).

Part E: Adjunct Voice and Iteration

Adjunct Participation in Design and Decision-Making

- Adjunct faculty who regularly teach the course are involved in curriculum decisions from the beginning, not only in implementation.
- The course has a documented feedback process where adjuncts can propose changes, and those proposals are seriously considered and responded to.
- Adjuncts receive visible credit for contributions they make (acknowledged in syllabus, course materials, department communications, or program documentation).

Ongoing Revision and Feedback Loops

- There is a documented process to revisit this checklist every 1–2 years, using both student data (DFW rates, disaggregated completion, qualitative feedback) and adjunct input to shape revisions.
- Changes made to the course are tracked and communicated to all instructors so they understand the evolution of the curriculum and can align their syllabi.
- Adjunct feedback is collected formally (via pulse surveys, debrief meetings, or feedback logs) and used to improve the course.

3.2: GATEWAY COURSE REDESIGN TEMPLATE

Purpose

Provide a structured process for redesigning gateway courses (composition, introductory mathematics, psychology, accounting, biology, etc.) around Community Cultural Wealth, student assets, transparent expectations, and clearly articulated pathways to next courses or employment. This template is designed for collaborative, iterative work involving both adjuncts and full-time faculty.

Step 1: Define the Real-Student Profile

Working individually or in pairs, and then as a full team, write brief profiles of 3–4 typical students currently enrolled in this course. Move beyond demographic labels and dig into lived reality:

For each student profile, describe:

- **Work and caregiving responsibilities:** How many hours per week does this student work? Do they have caregiving responsibilities (children, elderly parents, other dependents)? How does this affect their time and energy for coursework?
- **Linguistic background and prior schooling:** What languages does this student speak or read? What was their schooling like before college? Are they returning to education after years away? Do they have gaps in preparation for this course?

- **Technology and transportation:** Do they have reliable internet and a computer at home? Do they use their phone as their primary device? How do they get to campus? Does transportation limit their time on campus?
- **Financial situation:** Are they paying for college themselves? Working to support family? Receiving financial aid? How tight is their budget?
- **Goals and why they are taking this course:** Are they pursuing a degree in this discipline, or is this a general education/prerequisite course? Are they aiming to transfer or seeking immediate employment? What does success look like to them?

Example profiles:

- **Maria:** Works full-time as a medical assistant (35 hours/week), mother of two children (ages 3 and 7), speaks Spanish at home and is working to strengthen her English reading and writing. First in her family to attend college. Taking composition because it is required for her nursing prerequisites. Uses mostly phone; has unreliable internet at home. Needs evening/online classes. Child care is a barrier.
- **James:** Returning learner after 10 years in workforce, worked as a carpenter, now seeking to transition to facility management or construction management degree. Has gaps in math but strong practical problem-solving skills. Confident learner in hands-on contexts. Concerned about feeling "too old" in class.
- **Yuki:** International student on F-1 visa, strong in mathematics but navigating academic English in a discipline-specific context. Majoring in engineering. Has limited network in the U.S. and is careful about immigration status implications of all decisions.

Use this: Test every major design decision against these profiles.[66] Will an assignment work for Maria? Can James access the readings in the modality offered? Will the class schedule fit Yuki's constraints?

Step 2: Clarify Outcomes and Map Pathways

Working as a team (adjuncts + full-time faculty), collaboratively build a visual or narrative map showing:[67]

Course Learning Outcomes (in Plain Language)

- Write 3–5 core outcomes in language that students will understand.
- *Example: "You will be able to write clear, organized explanations of how mathematical procedures work and why they matter."*
- *Example: "You will analyze texts to understand what they argue and what evidence supports that argument."*

Mapping to Next Steps

For each outcome, identify:

- **Next course(s) in the sequence:** What prerequisite or co-requisite skills does the next course expect? How does this course set students up?
- **Transfer institution expectations:** If students are going to transfer, what do receiving institutions expect from this course? (Check transfer agreements, articulation documents, or contact with partner institutions.)

- **Workplace competencies:** If this is a workforce pathway, what job-relevant skills does this course build? (Check with employers in your community or labor market data.)
- **General education and transfer goals:** How does this course contribute to broader program or general education goals?
- **Create a visual map** showing how each major unit and assignment connects to these outcomes and pathways. Share this map in your syllabus so students understand the big picture.

Step 3: Redesign the First Three Weeks

The first three weeks of a course are disproportionately important. This is when students decide whether they belong, whether they understand what to do, and whether they will stay or drop.

As a team, co-design a common first-unit sequence (3–4 weeks) that:

Week 1: Welcome, Belonging, and Expectations

- Explicitly name students' strengths and assets (drawing on Community Cultural Wealth: intellectual, social, cultural, linguistic, navigational, and resistant capital).
- Invite students to introduce themselves in ways that honor their identities (not forced/tokenistic sharing, but genuine opportunity to be known).
- Overview of how this course works: structure, expectations, how to ask for help, how to succeed. Make hidden rules visible.
- First low-stakes assignment: something that lets them try and get feedback, building confidence. *Example: "Describe a time you solved a problem by using skills you already*

had." Shows you value their prior knowledge and serves as a writing sample in all courses across disciplines.

Week 2: Teach the Discipline's Language and Conventions

- What does "good work" look like in this field? Show examples (models, exemplars, annotated student work).
- If relevant: name and practice the language and conventions of this discipline. *Example: In composition, what does a strong thesis sound like? In math, how do mathematicians explain their thinking?*
- Provide sentence frames, templates, or language supports, especially for multilingual students. *Example: "In this course, you might hear words like 'thesis,' 'claim,' 'evidence.' Here is what they mean and how to use them."*
- Interactive practice: give students a chance to try in a low-stakes context and get feedback.

Week 3: First Major Assignment and Feedback Cycle

- Assign something that models what students will do throughout the course, but shorter and lower-stakes.
- Provide: clear prompt (purpose, audience, task), rubric or criteria, model or exemplar, and scaffolds/supports.
- Collect work, give detailed feedback quickly (within a week), and ask students to revise.
- Use this revision cycle to teach students how you give feedback and how to use it—a valuable skill for the whole course and beyond.

Output: A common first-unit syllabus section or sequence document that all instructors teaching this course will use, ensuring consistency and student experience.

Step 4: Align Assignments, Scaffolds, and Assessments Across the Course

For each major assignment in the course:

Clarify Purpose, Audience, and Genre

- *Example:* "This essay asks you to analyze a text and explain what the author is arguing and how the evidence supports that argument. Your audience is educated readers who may not be familiar with the text; your purpose is to help them understand the author's main point. This skill is central to college-level reading and writing."
- Make this explicit in the prompt so students know why they are doing this work and how it serves them.

Create Transparent Rubrics

- Use language students understand; avoid discipline jargon without explanation.
- Link criteria to outcomes and to what matters in the discipline or profession.
- Show what different performance levels look like (exemplars for "developing," "proficient," "advanced").
- If possible, co-create rubrics with students or show students how professionals in your field evaluate work.

Build in Scaffolds and Support

For multilingual students, first-generation students, and returning learners:

- Provide **models or exemplars** of strong work (not just rubrics).
- Create **language scaffolds** (sentence frames, transition words, vocabulary lists with context).
- Offer **checklists** that break complex tasks into steps.
- Provide **templates** for common structures (lab report template, essay outline format, spreadsheet structure).
- Build in **low-stakes practice** before the high-stakes version of an assignment.
- Offer **multiple drafts and revision opportunities** for major assignments.

Integrate Critical Language Awareness and Asset-Based Inquiry

- Where relevant, have students analyze **whose voices and perspectives are centered** in course materials and whose are absent. Why?
- Have students **practice critical reading or analysis** that names power relationships (in literature, history, science, business, etc.).
- Invite students to bring **their own communities' perspectives** into analysis and discussion.
- Name **language variety and code-switching** as normal and intelligent, not deficient.

Output: Aligned assignment sequence, shared rubrics, scaffolds, and models that all instructors use, ensuring students encounter consistency.

Step 5: Plan Adjunct Involvement and Ongoing Feedback

Before implementation:

- Identify at least 2–3 adjunct faculty who regularly teach this course to co-lead or pilot the redesigned elements.
- Schedule an orientation or planning meeting where adjuncts help shape the redesign and share their expertise on what works and what students actually struggle with.
- Ensure adjuncts are compensated for this planning time (see Section 2 on compensation for curriculum work).

During implementation:

- Ask adjuncts to pilot the new design, track what works and what does not, and report back.
- Hold mid-semester check-ins (1 hour) to gather feedback and make adjustments on the fly if needed.
- Celebrate wins and problem-solve challenges together.

At the end of the term:

- Collect data: DFW rates, passing rates by section, student feedback on clarity and support.
- Disaggregate data by section (if possible) and by student demographics (race/ethnicity, language background, first-generation status) to identify whether changes reduced equity gaps.

- Debrief with adjuncts: What worked? What would you change? What should we keep? What should we do differently next term?

Ongoing:

- Document all changes and the reasoning behind them so the curriculum is cumulative rather than restarting with each new person.
- Use the Adjunct Participation & Feedback Log (Tool 3.3) to track input and ensure it influences next iterations.
- Revisit the Equity-Centered Curriculum Design Checklist (Tool 3.1) annually, using both data and adjunct feedback to plan next improvements.

Output: A documented curriculum that evolves based on evidence and adjunct expertise, with clear records of adjunct contributions and influence.

3.3: ADJUNCT PARTICIPATION & FEEDBACK LOG FOR CURRICULUM WORK

Purpose

Ensure that adjunct expertise consistently shapes curriculum design, revision, and implementation. This log makes adjunct input visible and trackable over time, creating institutional memory and accountability. It documents not just who participated, but how their input influenced decisions.

Structure and Components

Create a simple shared log (in Google Sheets, a shared drive, or your LMS) for each course or program where curriculum work is happening. For each curriculum project, track:

Project Basics

- **Project name and focus:** *Example:* "ENG 101/111 Gateway Composition Redesign – Multilingual Writing Supports and First-Week Community Building"
- **Academic year and term(s):** When is this work happening?
- **Coordinator or lead:** Who is leading this work?

Adjunct Participation

- **Adjunct participants (names, courses taught, load):** Who is involved? How many sections do they teach?
- **Roles in this project:** Are they co-designers, pilot instructors, data analysts, reviewers, or facilitators? (Adjuncts may serve multiple roles.)
- **Compensation:** What compensation did they receive for this work? (\$, course credit, time allotment?)
- **Meeting dates and participation notes:** When did the team meet? Who attended? What key input did adjuncts offer?

Decisions and Influence

- **Key curriculum decisions made:** *Example:* "Created a common first-week syllabus focused on asset-based introduction and transparent expectations."

- **Adjunct input that influenced the decision:** *Example:* "During March 15 meeting, adjuncts from online sections noted that first week must include explicit navigation guidance; prompted us to add 'How to Succeed in This Course' syllabus section."
- **Evidence that adjunct input was taken seriously:** How did their feedback shape outcomes?

Data and Outcomes

- **Student data reviewed:** DFW rates, completion rates, disaggregated outcome data (by race/ethnicity, language background, first-generation status, section).
- **Changes made based on data and/or adjunct feedback:** *Example:* "Revision cycle pilot in three sections (led by adjuncts Rivera, Chen, Jackson) showed 15% improvement in assignment submission rates; adopted across all sections for fall."
- **Next steps or ongoing adjustments:** What will change based on what was learned?

Sample Log Template

Project	Term	Adjunct Participants	Roles	Key Decisions	Adjunct Influence	Student Data	Outcomes/Changes	Next Steps
ENG 101 Gateway Redesign	FA26	M. Rivera, J. Chen, K. Jackson	Co-designers, Pilot Instructors	Common first-week unit: Multilingual scaffolds	Adjuncts emphasized need for explicit navigation guidance, led to new syllabus section "How to Succeed."	DFW: 28% (down from 32%) Disaggregated by first-generation status and language background	Revision cycle adopted college-wide; Adjuncts invited to present at Fall Faculty Meeting	Spring 2025: Expand to add oral presentation options; adjuncts to propose changes

Uses and Revisiting

Quarterly or semi-annually:

- Share this log with adjunct participants to ensure accuracy and celebrate contributions.
- Use it to identify patterns: Are some adjuncts' ideas consistently showing up in curriculum? Are there voices missing?

Annual program review:

- Review the log as part of program or course assessment.
- Use it to track whether curriculum is getting more equitable, coherent, and responsive to student needs.
- Document adjunct leadership and contributions for their evaluation/recognition.

Every 1–2 years:

- Use the log to create a narrative summary of curriculum evolution and adjunct role in that evolution.
- Share this summary with leadership and adjuncts to make the institutional value of their work visible.
- Use it to plan next improvements: What areas need more attention? Whose expertise should we tap next?

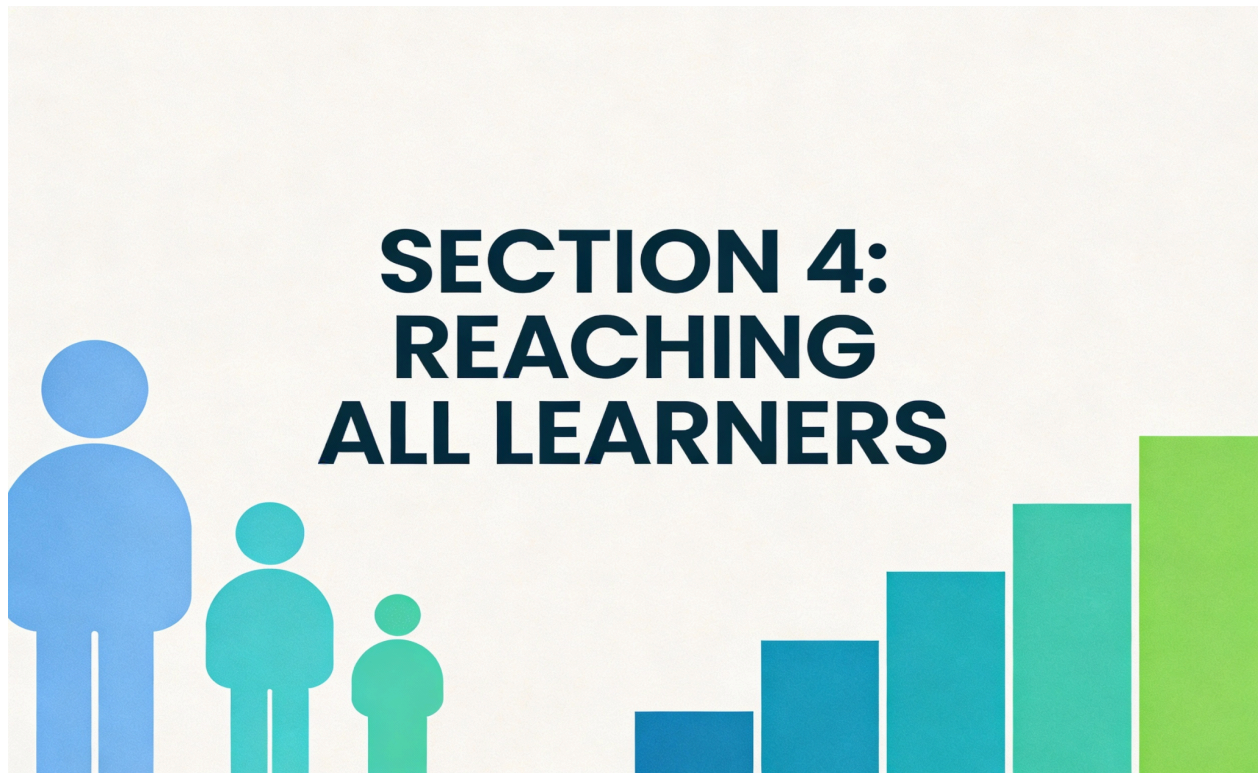
Why This Log Matters

For adjuncts: Documents their professional contributions, leadership, and influence. Valuable for evaluations, promotions, and professional portfolios.

For programs: Creates institutional memory about what worked and why. When new instructors join, they can see the thinking behind current curriculum, not just the final product.

For students: When curriculum is intentionally designed and regularly improved based on evidence, students benefit from coherence, clarity, and responsiveness to their needs.

For the institution: Shows that adjunct expertise is not peripheral—it is central to curriculum quality and student success.



Introduction: Reaching All Learners

Classrooms in community colleges are linguistically and culturally rich, but institutional practices often frame that richness as a problem to be managed rather than as a resource to build upon. Your research brings together critical language awareness, translanguaging, culturally responsive teaching, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and trauma-informed practice to argue that reaching all learners is both a pedagogical and structural commitment.

This section provides practical planning tools that help faculty design lessons and interactions that center **access**, asset, and agency. It invites instructors to anticipate variability, normalize multiple ways of knowing and expressing understanding, and make language and

power visible in ways that support students rather than shame them. The goal is not to simplify learning, but to remove unnecessary barriers so rigor becomes more widely reachable.

What This Section Helps You Do

- Plan lessons and units that anticipate differences in language, prior knowledge, disability, schedule, and affect, rather than reacting only after students struggle.
- Integrate multilingual and critical language awareness (CLA) practices into everyday teaching, not just specialized language courses.
- Embed trauma-informed routines—predictable structures, flexible demonstrations of understanding, and relational check-ins—into the flow of instruction.

Tools You Will Find Here

4.1 "Reaching All Learners" Lesson Planning Sheet

A concise planning guide that prompts faculty to consider variability in language, access, prior knowledge, and emotional load when designing each class session or unit.

4.2 Multilingual & Critical Language Awareness Practices One-Pager

A quick-reference sheet with concrete ways to normalize translanguaging, invite students' full linguistic repertoires, and explicitly discuss language and power in classroom routines.

4.3 Prompts for Flexible Demonstrations of Learning and Care-Centered Routines

A set of prompts that help faculty generate multiple options for students to show understanding and to build routines that foreground relationships, predictability, and student agency.

These tools are especially designed with adjunct conditions in mind: they focus on high-leverage routines that can be adopted quickly and adapted across multiple sections and institutions. They assume that pedagogies of care and linguistic justice are already emerging in adjunct practice and seek to name, support, and spread them.

SECTION 4: PEDAGOGY & REACHING ALL LEARNERS

The Problem

Adjuncts often teach multilingual, first-generation, working-adult, and neurodivergent students without targeted support or professional development for these populations. The result: students struggle, adjuncts struggle, potential goes unrealized. The solution: pedagogy training grounded in adjunct realities and student assets.

Where to Start: Pedagogy Workshop Series

Timing: Four 90-minute workshops, one per month; optional to repeat and deepen

Who should facilitate: A faculty member (adjunct or full-time) trained in the pedagogy, or a professional development coordinator

Who should join: All adjuncts interested; open to full-time faculty too

What you'll need:

- Toolkit 4 (Reaching All Learners)
- Workshop handouts (one per participant)
- Sample student work (anonymized)
- Optional: video clips of classroom practice

Facilitator's Language (Invitation):

"We're offering a four-part workshop series on reaching all learners in your classroom. Each session focuses on a high-leverage strategy: planning for variability, critical language awareness, flexible demonstrations of learning, and trauma-informed routines. No lecture. We'll

work with real student examples and practice strategies you can use NEXT WEEK. Lunch will be provided."

Workshop Series Structure

Workshop 1: Planning for Variability (90 minutes)

Goal: Help adjuncts think proactively about student differences in language, prior knowledge, ability, schedule, and affect.

- **0–10 min:** Welcome & topic intro
- **10–25 min:** Think-Pair-Share: "What's the most diverse class you've taught? What variability did you notice?"
- **25–45 min:** Mini-lesson: "Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is about designing for variability from the start, not reacting after students struggle."
- **45–70 min:** Practice: Using Toolkit 4.1, redesign one lesson for variability
 - What do students need to KNOW?
 - How will you SHOW IT multiple ways?
 - How can students SHOW YOU they learned it (multiple ways)?
- **70–85 min:** Gallery walk: Adjuncts post their redesigned lessons; others comment
- **85–90 min:** Closing: "What will you try this week?"

Workshop 2: Multilingual & Critical Language Awareness (90 minutes)

Goal: Adjuncts practice normalizing translanguaging and making language and power visible.

- **0–10 min:** Welcome; recap Workshop 1

- **10–25 min:** Why this matters: "Multilingual students are not 'deficit.' They bring full linguistic repertoires. Our job is to expand what's possible, not shame."
- **25–45 min:** Watch & debrief: Short video of classroom multilingual practice (5 min); discussion (10 min)
- **45–70 min:** Practice with Toolkit 4.2: Using one assignment from participants' courses, design:
 - Where can students use any language?
 - How do you make language expectations transparent?
 - Where do you teach language and power explicitly?
- **70–85 min:** Small group: Share one change you'll make
- **85–90 min:** Closing: "Language is power. You're helping students navigate it."

Workshop 3: Flexible Demonstrations of Learning & Care Routines (90 minutes)

Goal: Adjuncts design multiple ways for students to show learning; embed trauma-informed routines.

- **0–10 min:** Welcome; recap; why flexibility matters for working-adult, neurodiverse, first-gen students
- **10–30 min:** Fishbowl: Watch two adjuncts discuss "a time a student showed understanding in an unexpected way"
- **30–50 min:** Using Toolkit 4.3, design multiple assessment options for ONE key assignment
 - Written essay?
 - Diagram?

- Recorded explanation?
- Discussion with you?
- Project/portfolio?
- **50–70 min:** Embed care routines: "What brief relational practices will you use?"
 - Opening check-in?
 - Predictable class structure?
 - Grace policies?
 - Exit reflections?
- **70–85 min:** Practice: Facilitator models one care routine with participants; they practice in pairs
- **85–90 min:** Closing: "Care is not soft. It's foundational to learning."

Workshop 4: Putting It Together & Sustainability (90 minutes)

Goal: Adjuncts integrate all three strategies into one course; plan for ongoing peer support.

- **0–10 min:** Welcome; celebration of work so far
- **10–30 min:** Each adjunct brings their syllabus; redesigns one section using all three toolkit strategies
- **30–60 min:** Peer feedback: "What do you notice? What will this do for students?"
- **60–75 min:** Commitment: "What will you implement next semester? How will you track impact?"
- **75–85 min:** Building the learning community: "Will we keep meeting? As a teaching circle? A book club? An assessment group?"
- **85–90 min:** Closing: "You're not alone. Keep connecting. Keep learning."

Facilitator Tips: Making It Real

Challenge: *Adjuncts come but say, "This is great, but I can't change everything in my course."*

Response:

- "You don't need to. Pick ONE thing. Add one flexible assessment option. Embed one care routine. Try one multilingual practice. Small changes compound."
- "Let's start with your easiest course. What's one assignment you'd like to redesign?"
- "We'll meet in a month and check in. Tell me what you tried and what happened."

Challenge: *Some adjuncts feel defensive: "Are you saying my teaching is bad?"*

Response:

- "No. You're already doing some of these things. We're naming and expanding what works."
- "Teaching is hard. You're juggling a lot. These strategies are designed WITH adjunct realities in mind, not against them."
- "Let's work together. What would help?"

Challenge: *Attendance drops after Workshop 2.*

Response:

- Offer a hybrid option: "Can't make it in person? Join via Zoom."
- Offer asynchronous option: "Watch the video and try one strategy. Come to the debrief."
- Offer follow-up mini-sessions: "Short on time? Come to a 30-minute demo: 'Quick Multilingual Moves.'"

Measuring Impact

After the workshop series:

Ask participants:

- "Did you try something new?" (What? How'd it go?)
- "Are your students responding differently?"
- "Would you do this again?" (Why? Why not?)
- "What support would help you keep going?"

Look for:

- **Course redesigns:** Number of syllabi or assignments changed
- **Student feedback:** Do students report more engagement, more support, more flexibility?
- **Adjunct retention:** Are workshop participants staying at the college?
- **Peer adoption:** Are other faculty trying these approaches?

SECTION 4 TOOLS

4.1: "REACHING ALL LEARNERS" LESSON PLANNING SHEET

Purpose

Support faculty in planning individual class sessions or short units that proactively account for learner variability in language, access, prior knowledge, disability, and affect.

How to Use

- Complete this one-page planner for a key lesson or unit, ideally before the term starts or at the beginning of each week.
- Revisit after teaching to note what supported access and where students still faced barriers.

Planning Prompts

Learning goals (plain language):

What should students know, do, or understand by the end of this lesson?

Multiple means of representation (UDL):

- How will you present key ideas (e.g., spoken explanation, visuals, written notes, examples from students' communities)?
- What language supports will you provide (glossaries, sentence frames, bilingual resources)?

Multiple means of action and expression:

- How can students show understanding in more than one way (short writing, diagram, audio message, small-group share)?
- What low-stakes option will you offer for students who are anxious or absent?

Multiple means of engagement and care:

- What brief check-in or relational routine will you use (arrival question, quick chat, pulse poll)?
- How will you acknowledge students' lives outside class (work, caregiving, mental health)?

Language and power moves (CLA):

- Where can you explicitly name how language and power show up in this topic or assignment?
- How will you validate students' home languages and varieties while teaching them to navigate dominant norms?

Anticipated barriers and planned supports:

- Time, technology, reading load, new vocabulary, prior knowledge gaps, trauma triggers.
- What small adjustments can reduce these barriers without lowering rigor?

4.2: MULTILINGUAL & CRITICAL LANGUAGE AWARENESS PRACTICES

ONE-PAGER

Purpose

Offer quick, concrete strategies to normalize translanguaging, honor students' full linguistic repertoires, and build critical awareness of language and power into daily teaching.

Core practice	Concrete strategies
Normalize multiple languages in class	Invite students to brainstorm or draft in any language, then share key ideas in English. Allow bilingual glossaries, side-by-side translations, or multilingual group talk before whole-class sharing.
Make language expectations transparent	Explain when formal academic English is expected and why, and when a wider range of styles is welcome. Share models at different levels and annotate how language choices work for audience and purpose.
Teach language and power explicitly	Use short activities where students analyze who is quoted, cited, or centered in readings and whose voices are missing. Discuss how accents, dialects, and language varieties are valued or stigmatized in the field.
Respond to language with care	Prioritize meaning and ideas in grading; separate content feedback from surface features. Offer targeted language suggestions rather than marking every error, and invite revision.
Create low-stakes spaces to practice	Use journals, discussion boards, or “messy drafts” where correctness is not graded. Include peer-review protocols that focus first on clarity and argument, then on editing.

4.3: PROMPTS FOR FLEXIBLE DEMONSTRATIONS OF LEARNING AND CARE-CENTERED ROUTINES

Purpose

Help instructors design options for how students can demonstrate learning and embed simple, sustainable routines that communicate care and predictability.

Flexible Demonstrations of Learning – Design Prompts

For a major concept or outcome, ask:

- How could students show understanding in:
 - A short written explanation?
 - A labeled diagram, chart, or concept map?
 - A brief recorded explanation (audio/video)?
 - A small-group or whole-class presentation?
 - An applied task connected to work, family, or community?
- Which of these options could be available to all students as equivalent choices?
- What shared rubric or criteria will ensure consistent rigor across different formats?

Care-Centered and Trauma-Informed Routines

Choose 1–3 routines to use consistently, such as:

Opening check-ins:

One-sentence share, poll, or quickwrite about how students are arriving to class.

Predictable structure:

A recurring class pattern (e.g., welcome → recap → mini-lesson → practice → debrief) posted and followed each day.

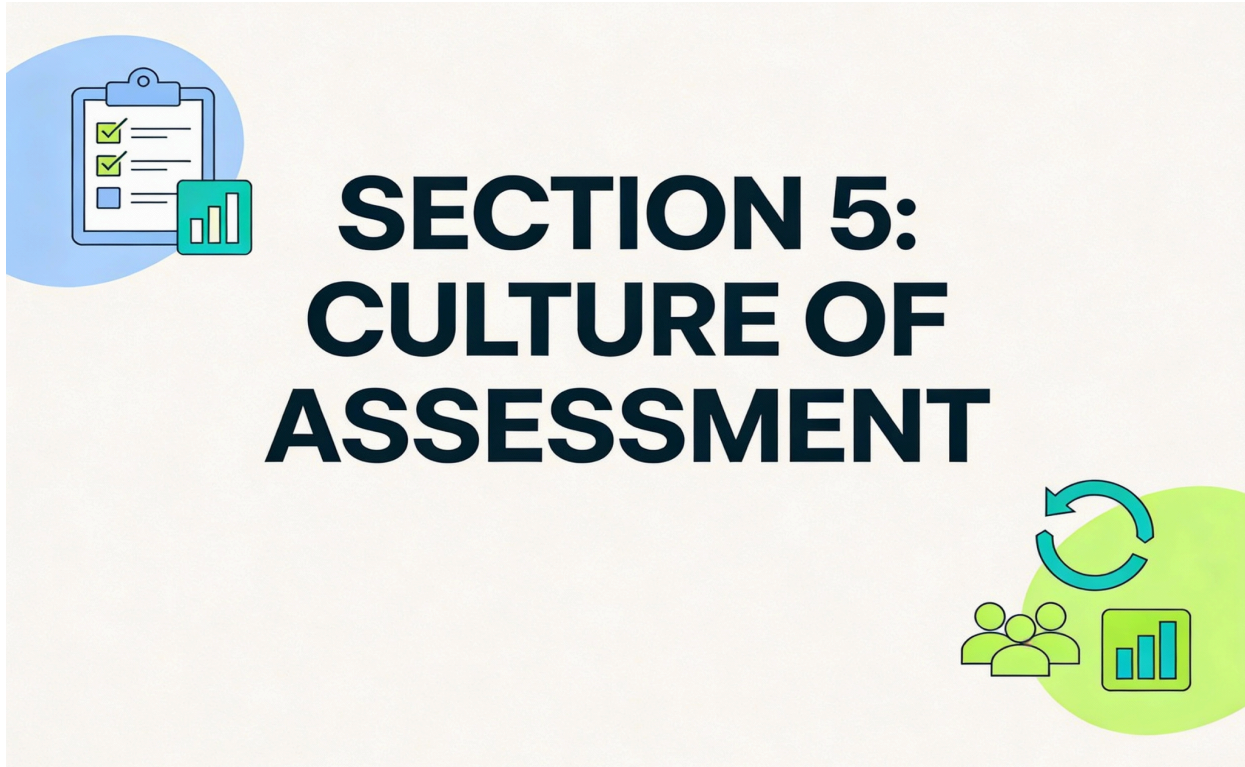
Grace policies:

Clearly stated late-work or revision options that acknowledge work and caregiving realities while keeping boundaries.

Exit questions:

One prompt at the end of class about what was clear, confusing, or connecting to their lives; review responses before the next lesson.

These tools are designed as high-leverage moves that adjuncts can adapt across multiple courses and institutions without extensive prep time.



Introduction: Culture of Assessment

Assessment in many institutions has become synonymous with compliance: collecting data to satisfy external requirements rather than to inform teaching and learning. A different culture is possible, one where assessment is treated as shared inquiry, where adjunct and full-time faculty interpret evidence together, and where results lead to concrete changes in curriculum, pedagogy, and policy.

We must reframe assessment as a collaborative, iterative process that belongs to the people doing the teaching. When faculty, including contingent faculty, participate in defining questions, reviewing student work, and planning next steps, burnout decreases and instructional

coherence increases. Rather than adding more layers of measurement, these tools simplify and focus on what faculty can use.

What This Section Helps You Do

- Design inclusive assessment cycles that engage adjunct-taught sections and foreground equity questions, including disaggregated outcomes and student experience data.
- Reflect honestly on local assessment culture and identify shifts needed to move from surveillance to shared learning.
- Connect assessment results to concrete adjustments in curriculum, professional development, and governance.

Tools You Will Find Here

5.1 Inclusive Assessment Cycle Template

A streamlined template that walks departments through defining shared questions, gathering evidence from all sections, including those taught by adjuncts, and identifying next actions.

5.2 Assessment Culture Reflection Tool

A structured set of questions to help faculty and leaders examine current assessment practices, power dynamics, and uses of data, and to plan specific shifts toward a culture of inquiry.

5.3 Simple Structures for Shared Scoring Conversations and Action Planning

Ready-to-adapt agendas and note-catchers for norming sessions, shared scoring of student work, and translating findings into curriculum and professional-learning plans.

The resources in this section close the loop with earlier parts of the toolkit. Governance tools create structures where decisions about assessment and improvement are shared;

micro-leadership roles and communities of practice provide the venues where evidence is interpreted; curriculum and pedagogy tools offer the levers to act on what assessment reveals. Together, they support a culture where adjuncts are not merely evaluated but are leaders in defining and improving student learning.

SECTION 5: CULTURE OF ASSESSMENT

The Problem

Assessment is often treated as compliance: data collected, adjuncts excluded, no follow-up. The result: faculty don't trust assessment; students don't see changes. The solution: inclusive, iterative assessment cycles where adjuncts help ask questions, interpret data, and take action.

Where to Start: Assessment Culture Reflection

Timing: 90 minutes, done with department faculty (20–30 people ideally)

Who should facilitate: Assessment coordinator, department chair, or faculty governance representative

What you'll need:

- Toolkit 5.2 (Assessment Culture Reflection Tool)
- Flip charts or shared document
- Optional: recent assessment report to reference

Facilitator's Language (Framing):

"We're going to spend an hour looking honestly at how assessment works in our department. Not to judge. To see clearly. We'll look at: Who participates? What questions are we asking? Do we actually use the findings? Are adjuncts part of this? Then we'll decide: what's working? What needs to change?"

Meeting Agenda: Assessment Culture Reflection (90 minutes)

0–10 min: Welcome & Why This Matters

- "Assessment can feel like compliance. It doesn't have to be."
- "When faculty participate in defining questions, reading student work, and planning improvements, assessment becomes learning."
- "Today, we're taking an honest look."

10–30 min: Reflection Domain 1—Purpose & Ownership

- Using Toolkit 5.2 prompts:
 - "When people say 'assessment,' what do they think?" (Compliance? Learning? Evaluation? Judgment?)
 - "Who in our department feels assessment is THEIRS? Who feels it's being DONE TO them?"
- Record answers. Patterns matter.

30–50 min: Reflection Domain 2—Participation & Power

- "How are adjuncts currently involved in assessment?"
 - Setting questions?
 - Selecting evidence?
 - Interpreting results?
 - Planning action?
- Be specific. Record what's true, not what should be true.

50–70 min: Reflection Domain 3—Equity & Data Use

- "When we look at assessment data, what do we disaggregate?"
 - By student demographic? By adjunct/full-time sections? By modality?
- "When we see a gap (DFW rates higher in one section) how do we talk about it?"
 - Student deficit? Or structural gap?
- Adjuncts speak: "Here's what I see from the classroom side. Here's what the data misses."

70–85 min: What Needs to Change?

- "What's one shift we could make THIS YEAR?"
 - Add adjuncts to assessment conversations?
 - Start disaggregating data differently?
 - Actually follow up on findings?
- Specific, doable, time-bound.

85–90 min: Next Steps

- "Who will own this change?"
- "When will we check back in?"

Moving Forward: Inclusive Assessment Cycle

Once you've done the reflection, implement an inclusive cycle using Toolkit 5.1:

Step 1: Frame the Question (Week 1)

- "What do we want to learn about student learning in [course/program]?"
- Framing should be inquiry-focused, not evaluative

- Include adjuncts in this conversation, not just as data collectors

Step 2: Select Evidence (Week 2)

- "Which assignments, projects, or exams will we look at?"
- Deliberately include assignments from adjunct-taught sections
- Plan to disaggregate by instructor status, modality, demographics

Step 3: Develop/Revisit Shared Criteria (Week 3)

- "What does good student work look like?"
- Use or develop a rubric that values diverse ways of showing learning
- Test the rubric: Does it recognize multilingual students' strengths? First-generation students' problem-solving? Working adult's practical wisdom?

Step 4: Gather and Review Work Together (Week 4–5)

- Schedule a 90-minute shared scoring session
- Both adjuncts and full-time faculty read the same student work
- Use prompts: "What's the student doing well? Where are they getting stuck? What surprised us?"
- This is NOT grading. This is a collaborative inquiry.

Step 5: Interpret with Equity Lens (Week 6)

- "Where do patterns differ across sections?"
- "What might explain these differences?"
 - Structural? (Different amount of class time, different support)

- Pedagogical? (Different approaches to teaching)
- Student? (Different backgrounds, different needs)
- Name adjuncts as sense-makers. "What do YOU see from teaching three sections?"

Step 6: Plan and Document Next Actions (Week 7)

- "What will we change in [course/pedagogy/support]?"
- Make it specific: Not "improve writing," but "add peer review rounds" or "reduce assignment load by 20%"
- Decide: Who implements? By when? How will we know if it worked?
- Compensate adjuncts involved in planning

Step 7: Close the Loop and Communicate (Ongoing)

- Share findings and planned changes with all faculty, including adjuncts not in the room
- "Here's what we learned. Here's what we're doing about it."
- Come back next year: "Did this change help?"

Facilitator Tips: Making Assessment Inclusive

Challenge: *Assessment conversations feel abstract; people zone out.*

Solution:

- Bring student WORK. Real papers, projects, exams.
- Ask questions: "Read these two. What's different? What's similar?"
- Most faculty love talking about student work. Use that.

Challenge: *When gaps appear, people blame students: "They're not prepared" or "Adjuncts don't teach as rigorously."*

Response:

- "I hear you. AND let's look at the data. What structural factors might matter?"
- "Adjuncts teach the same course. Do they have the same resources? Same prep time? Same class size?"
- "Let's ask: not 'why are students failing?' but 'what's our role in creating the conditions for success?'"

Challenge: *Assessment findings don't lead to action.*

Response:

- Require action planning: Part of the cycle is "what will we change?"
- Make someone responsible: "Who will lead this change? By when?"
- Check in: "In three months, let's see: did we implement this? What happened?"

Measuring Impact

After one assessment cycle:

Ask faculty:

- "Did this feel different from past assessment?" (How?)
- "Did adjuncts participate?" (In what ways?)
- "Did findings lead to change?" (What changed?)
- "Will we do this again?" (Why? Why not?)

Track:

- **Participation:** Number of adjuncts in conversations
- **Action:** Number of changes implemented based on findings
- **Student impact:** Did disaggregated data show improvements?
- **Faculty sentiment:** Do faculty trust assessment more?

SECTION 5 TOOLS

5.1: INCLUSIVE ASSESSMENT CYCLE TEMPLATE

Purpose

Offer a simple, repeatable process for planning, conducting, and using assessment that includes adjunct-taught sections and keeps equity at the center.

Cycle Steps (Outline for Department Use)

1. Frame the question

- What do we want to learn about student learning in this course/program this term?
- How will we phrase the question so it invites inquiry rather than blame?

2. Select evidence

- Which assignments, exams, or projects will we sample across all sections (including adjunct sections)?
- How will we disaggregate by modality, instructor status, and student demographics to see equity patterns?

3. Develop or revisit shared criteria

- What shared rubric or set of criteria will we use?
- Does the rubric recognize multilingual, first-generation, and disabled students' strengths and not only deficits?

4. Gather and review student work together

- Schedule brief, focused sessions where adjuncts and full-time faculty score or sort work together.
- Use guiding questions: What are students doing well? Where are they getting stuck? What surprises us?

5. Interpret with an equity lens

- Where do patterns differ by course section, modality, or student group?
- What structural or curricular factors might explain these differences, rather than student "motivation" alone?

6. Plan and document next actions

- Identify 2–3 concrete changes to curriculum, pedagogy, or supports for the next term.
- Note who will do what, by when, and how you will check impact.

7. Close the loop and communicate

- Share key findings and planned changes with all instructors, including adjuncts.
- Revisit the same question in a future cycle to see what has shifted.

5.2: ASSESSMENT CULTURE REFLECTION TOOL

Purpose

Provide structured prompts for departments or programs to examine how assessment currently functions and what shifts are needed to move toward shared, equity-centered inquiry.

Reflection Domains and Sample Prompts

Purpose and ownership

- When we say "assessment" here, what do people think of first—compliance or learning?
- Who feels that assessment is "theirs," and who feels it is being done to them?

Participation and power

- How are adjuncts currently involved in setting questions, selecting evidence, and interpreting results?
- Where do decisions about methods and reporting sit (department, dean, institutional office)?

Equity and data use

- Do we regularly disaggregate results (race/ethnicity, language background, first-gen status, modality, instructor status)?
- When gaps appear, how do we talk about them (deficits in students or gaps in structures and supports)?

Follow-through and learning

- What is one example where assessment clearly led to a change in curriculum or pedagogy?
- Where have we collected data without meaningful follow-up, and why?

Teams can use this tool in retreats, department meetings, or community-of-practice sessions to name current realities and set 1–2 realistic shifts per year.

Reflection Domain	Core Focus	Sample Reflection Questions	Notes & Possible Shifts
Purpose and ownership	Why we assess and who “owns” it	When we say “assessment” here, what do people think of first—compliance or learning? - Who feels that assessment is “theirs,” and who feels it is being done to them?	<i>(Current reality, tensions, and 1–2 shifts to move toward shared, learning-oriented assessment.)</i>
Participation and power	Who is involved and who decides	How are adjuncts currently involved in setting questions, selecting evidence, and interpreting results? - Where do decisions about methods and reporting sit (department, dean, institutional office)?	<i>(Whose voices are missing? What concrete changes would broaden participation and redistribute decision-making power?)</i>
Equity and data use	How we use and talk about data	Do we regularly disaggregate results (race/ethnicity, language background, first-gen status, modality, instructor status)? - When gaps appear, do we talk about “deficits” in students or gaps in structures and supports?	<i>(What disaggregation or narrative shifts are needed to center equity and avoid deficit framing?)</i>
Follow-through and learning	What happens after data is collected	What is one example where assessment clearly led to a change in curriculum or pedagogy? Where have we collected data without meaningful follow-up, and why?	<i>(List 1–2 specific changes you will try this year, who is responsible, and how you’ll know they happened.)</i>

5.3: SHARED SCORING CONVERSATIONS AND ACTION-PLANNING STRUCTURES

Purpose

Offer simple, reusable agendas and note-catchers for shared scoring of student work and for turning assessment findings into specific, time-bound action steps. These structures:

- Emphasize shared inquiry into student work rather than evaluation of individual instructors.
- Create protected space where adjunct and full-time faculty interpret evidence together and connect it to curriculum and pedagogy.

Sample Shared Scoring Agenda (60–90 Minutes)

Step	Time	What We Will Do	Notes / Decisions
1. Welcome & purpose	5–10 min	Clarify that the goal is shared learning about student work, not evaluation of individual instructors. Name norms (focus on evidence, equity, and improvement).	
2. Review question & criteria	10–15 min	Restate our assessment question. Walk through rubric/criteria; highlight how it reflects equity and values diverse learners.	
3. Individual review of samples	15–20 min	Each participant scores or sorts anonymized student work from multiple sections (incl. adjuncts). Note strengths, confusions, surprises.	
4. Group discussion	20–30 min	Discuss patterns: Where are students strong? Where do they struggle? Where do scores differ and why? What equity issues do we notice?	
5. Action planning	15–20 min	Identify 2–3 changes to curriculum, pedagogy, or supports to try next term. Decide who leads, needed support, and evidence we'll look for next time.	

Simple Action-Planning Note-Catcher

1. **Assessment question**

What were we trying to learn about student learning in this cycle?

2. **Evidence reviewed**

Assignment/task:

Number of samples:

Sections included (incl. adjunct-taught, modalities):

a. Key patterns and equity insights

What did we see students doing well?

Where were the most common struggles?

*Where did we notice differences by section, modality, or student group
(if visible in the work)?*

3. Decisions: What we will change

Curriculum (e.g., sequence, outcomes, texts):

Pedagogy (e.g., scaffolds, models, feedback routines):

Supports (e.g., tutoring, workshops, resources):

4. Timeline and responsible roles

Who will do what?

By when?

How are adjuncts involved in leading or piloting these changes?

5. How and when we will revisit

When will we look at this question again (term/year)?

What evidence will tell us whether the changes helped?

(Examples, DFW patterns, rubric scores, student feedback)?



A Final Note:

The story of adjunct faculty in community colleges has too often been told as a story of scarcity: not enough money, not enough time, not enough security, not enough voice. However, scarcity is not the whole story. Beneath the precarity is a deep well of expertise, commitment, and creativity that has kept classrooms open, students supported, and programs alive even in the most under-resourced conditions. Adjuncts have innovated around rigid schedules, complex student lives, and shifting institutional demands with almost no structural support. The question is not whether they can lead. The question is whether colleges will finally build systems that let that leadership shape what happens next.

This toolkit does not pretend that small changes will fix a structural problem. It does something more honest and more powerful. It breaks transformation into concrete, winnable moves. One governance audit that reveals who is missing from the table. One new compensated

adjunct seat on a key committee. One teaching circle that becomes a community of practice. One gateway course redesigned with adjuncts at the center. One assessment cycle where adjunct-taught sections are not just included in the data but interpreted by the people who taught those students. Each of these steps is modest on its own. Together, they begin to flip the script from “adjuncts as stopgaps” to “adjuncts as co-architects of the institution.”

If you are an adjunct, this is a call to name and leverage the leadership you already practice. Document what you do for students, where you see gaps, and where your expertise is currently ignored. Use the tools here to gather colleagues, map governance, and propose specific roles and structures that make your contributions visible and compensated. Power grows when people move together. You do not need permission to start convening, reflecting, and planning.

If you are a full-time faculty member or department chair, this is a call to use your positional power to open doors and share authority. Look at every committee, every agenda, every curriculum decision and ask: where are the adjuncts who actually teach these courses? Use the governance and micro-leadership tools to redesign how your department works so that adjunct participation is expected, supported, and paid, not an exception or a favor. Your integrity as a colleague is measured not by how much you sympathize with adjuncts, but by how much you change the conditions that keep them marginalized.

If you are an administrator or policymaker, this is a call to align budgets and structures with the mission you claim. Community colleges exist to expand access and equity. That mission collapses if the faculty teaching most students cannot afford to stay, cannot participate in decisions, and cannot build long-term relationships with learners. Investing in distributed leadership, compensated governance roles for adjuncts, funded communities of practice,

inclusive assessment cycles, is not a luxury line item. It is a strategy for retention, completion, and public trust.

Change of this magnitude can feel overwhelming. However, institutions are changed by the meetings that happen, the roles that are created, the policies that are revised, and the conversations that refuse to accept “this is just how it is.” You do not have to overhaul everything at once. You have to choose a starting point and move. Run the audit. Add the seat. Launch the circle. Share the data. Try one tool, then another, and refuse to let the inevitable friction be an excuse for retreat.

The future of community colleges will be written by those who show up to design it. Adjunct faculty are already writing that future in their classrooms every day, often under conditions that make their work harder than it has to be. This toolkit is an invitation and a challenge to everyone else in the system to meet them there. It challenges us to build structures worthy of the labor, worthy of the students, and worthy of the mission community colleges claim. The work ahead is not simple, but it is possible. It is necessary and it begins with a decision to stop talking about change and start implementing it, together, now.

This work is hard. Transformation is slow. But it is necessary and possible.

For adjuncts and advocates: Use this guide to build power. Name what you see. Organize. The toolkit is legitimacy. Use it.

For faculty leaders: Use this guide to create space. Your voice carries. Invite adjuncts in. Mean it.

For administrators: Use this guide to align resources with values. Put your money where your mission is. Faculty equity is student equity.

For all: Remember why. Every adjustment to governance, every teaching circle, every redesigned course, every inclusive assessment: it's about students. Students whose success depends on faculty who are supported, heard, and invested. You can do this. Start now.

VITA

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