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### **Adjunct Orientations Take Hold, With a Variety of Approaches**

*By Audrey Williams June*

Ellen Belluomini, an adjunct faculty member at National Louis University, never participated in a campuswide orientation before she first set foot in a classroom at the Chicago institution nearly two decades ago.

That's because National Louis didn't have one—until last year, after Ms. Belluomini and a colleague created an online course to help adjuncts acclimate to their jobs. The university, like a growing number of colleges, says it now views adjunct orientation as a critical part of preparing the front lines of the instructional staff to succeed.

But what's on the agenda of an adjunct orientation, how it's delivered, and how good it is varies widely, depending on the institution and the department in which an adjunct works. Some orientations take a utilitarian approach, dispensing must-have nuggets of information for day-to-day survival, such as how to file grades, get access to e-mail, and make copies of coursework for students.

Others place particular focus on how to respond to potential problems like student plagiarism, arguments about grades, disruptive classroom behavior, or violent crimes on the campus.

Most institutions offer some kind of introductory program for adjuncts, but on many campuses adjuncts question its quality and usefulness. Even if the information provided is deemed helpful, adjuncts often have multiple teaching obligations that conflict with attendance—especially when they're not paid for their time, as is typically the case.

In response, adjunct orientations are often compressed into short blocks of time that don't lend themselves to deep discussion about how to give interesting lectures, better engage students, or try out new teaching strategies.

National Louis employs 200 to 300 adjuncts during any given term,

and they make up almost 44 percent of the faculty. The university plans eventually to require adjuncts, both old and new, to complete the online orientation before they can receive teaching assignments, says Tom Bergmann, vice president for human resources at National Louis.

"Like many other universities, we have a fairly significant percentage of classes that are taught by adjuncts," Mr. Bergmann says, "and to not provide them with this level of professional development would be very shortsighted on our part."

The university's adjunct orientation is led by Linda Kryzak, an adjunct who is a member of the institution's adjunct council. She helped Ms. Belluomini, chair of the council, create the online course, which participants get four weeks to complete. The course stemmed from a survey conducted by the council to gauge adjuncts' interest in training and professional development.

The course covers information about the university, academic-support services, adjunct-faculty benefits, resources on pedagogy, and a range of academic policies and handbooks. Also discussed are how to accommodate students with disabilities, how to use the university's learning-management system, how to teach adult learners, and how to create rubrics for grading assignments.

Ms. Kryzak, an instructor in the National College of Education, and Ms. Belluomini, an instructor in the College of Arts and Sciences, received a \$5,000 faculty-development grant from the university to finance the creation of the orientation, which 52 adjuncts have completed so far through a pilot program. At National Louis, instructors aren't paid for the time they spend receiving that introduction to their jobs.

Stephanie Poczos, who teaches in the university's College of Arts and Sciences and its National College of Education, was a member of the first group of adjuncts who took the course. A seven-year veteran at the institution, she says she still learned "a ton about the university."

Ms. Poczos, who works full time as the coordinator of e-learning for a school district in the Chicago area, says when she arrived at National Louis she pieced together on her own the information that was conveniently packaged in the online orientation: "It probably took me a few years of teaching a class every term to figure everything out."

## **Opportunity to Engage**

At Mesa Community College, in Arizona, part of the focus of adjunct orientation is establishing bonds among adjuncts, says Jennifer Strickland, interim director of the college's Center for Teaching and Learning. "I see orientation as the perfect opportunity to engage your faculty," she says. "They're new, and they need to feel like a member of the community."

Adjunct orientation at the college happens in person, not online, and features senior administrators and other speakers who provide standard information, like how to turn on classroom projectors, get access to e-mail, and secure parking passes. The voluntary program also includes a team-building activity that calls for groups of adjuncts to build structures out of marshmallows and toothpicks, with the goal of constructing the tallest one that can stand on its own.

The exercise breaks the ice, Ms. Strickland says, and makes it easier for attendees to freely discuss core issues later in orientation, like those related to teaching and learning.

Ms. Strickland says the orientation, held every semester, runs for four hours, and adjuncts who attend are paid \$26.50 an hour—a rate set by the community-college district that covers up to 10 hours of educational development a year.

Faculty-development experts say in-person orientation is often more effective than dispensing information online, an approach many colleges take.

"It's pretty easy not to fully engage in an online orientation," says Richard E. Lyons, who founded Faculty Development Associates, a company that conducts faculty-development workshops for colleges. "Some people are going to take it very seriously, but there's a percentage that's not. I think to be perceived as meaningful these kinds of sessions need to be two-way."

When adjuncts run into an issue on the job, he adds, it helps if they have at least met the person they need to call for help.

At Queens College, part of the City University of New York, one goal of its new in-person orientation is to introduce adjuncts to as many people who can help them as possible in a two-hour period, says Eva Fernández, assistant vice provost and director of the Center for Teaching and Learning. The event, which the college started offering last fall in response to a recommendation by an adjunct task force, is not mandatory, and adjuncts are not paid to attend. But administrators hope people will find it useful enough that they will make time for it.

Orientation at Queens is a fast-moving parade of speakers who are given five minutes each to talk about such things as how to submit grades, how to use technology in teaching, how to join an online discussion group for adjuncts, and how the faculty union and faculty benefits work.

"Our content has been geared around things faculty should know to do their day-to-day work," Ms. Fernández says. "When you're teaching at a new campus, you need the utilitarian information." The orientation is available in person on the campus, is streamed live, and is then archived online.

Some attendees, like James Park, were first-timers in the classroom. Mr. Park, a graduate teaching fellow, leads two sections of a modern-logic class. He started teaching at Queens last fall.

"I was so new at teaching, I thought it would be a good idea to take advantage of it," says Mr. Park of the orientation he attended last fall. "They did a really good job of covering all the logistical aspects of teaching."

Although the orientation didn't focus on tips to help Mr. Park shine in the classroom, it did introduce him to a course, offered by the college's Center for Teaching and Learning, that would make his teaching better. Mr. Park, a second-year Ph.D. student in philosophy, is now enrolled in "Theatre Techniques to Improve Your Teaching."

Ms. Fernández says she'd like to see "more discussion of good teaching" during orientation, but time constraints make that impossible.

Still, the adjunct orientation at Queens is a way to "encourage faculty of all types to be part of the fabric of the college," Ms. Fernández says. Part-timers, as adjuncts there are also called, number more than 800, making up about 60 percent of the faculty.

### **Missing Information**

Elsewhere, orientation for adjuncts covers a wide range of topics, but can sometimes fall short when it comes to specifics.

That was the case for Katie Bethea, a full-time science writer for NASA, who teaches freshman composition at Thomas Nelson Community College, in Hampton, Va. Orientation before her first semester of teaching, last fall, was a two-hour event in an auditorium open to adjuncts from all departments. After a welcome from a senior administrator, she says, the orientation was largely

focused on various university policies.

However, Ms. Bethea says, information about how to complete key tasks, such as how to report grades, was "glossed over." She says she spent a lot of time going back to the department head or the coordinator to figure out how to log on to e-mail and her Blackboard account.



A nice addition to orientation would be the chance to interact with other professors who teach freshman composition, Ms. Bethea says. That way, she could get guidance from her colleagues on best practices in the classroom.

"I'm a full-time professional writer with a master's degree, but I'm not an educator," Ms. Bethea says. "I had to whip together a syllabus four days before classes started, and it would be good to know if what I'm teaching is on par with what other people are teaching in their class."


At National Louis, once adjuncts complete their orientation, they can continue to communicate with one another about workplace issues in an online "faculty cafe."

Ms. Poczos uses the cafe to bounce ideas off peers she met through orientation, following up with them about teaching practices and the best ways to use technology in class.

"I very much appreciate," she says, "that National Louis has recognized the need to train adjuncts to make them feel like they are part of the university community."

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 **adamlowe\_nacep** 2 days ago

The 83 concurrent enrollment programs accredited by National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships ([www.NACEP.org](http://www.NACEP.org)) all provide orientation to high school teachers who serve as adjuncts teaching entry-level college courses to high school students. Our standards require that this orientation not only cover the nuts and bolts of teaching for the

college, but also the course- and discipline-specific content that Ms. Bethea found absent in her training. In order to maintain the academic integrity of its courses, every college and university should commit faculty resources to collaborative curriculum and syllabi development, ensuring consistent assessment methods, and aligning grading scales. Absent such measures, it is hard to see how institutions can vouch for the academic integrity of the credits they transcript.

Like Reply



**tcolb01** 1 day ago

As an 11-year community college adjunct (who eventually became full-time and is now retired), these types of activities appear to me to be a complete waste of time and money. Adjunct orientation is best accomplished by the hiring official with the aid of an employment manual. I agree with those adjuncts mentioned in this article who "question its quality and usefulness."

3 people liked this. Like Reply



**keitharizona** 22 hours ago

This seems like a lot to force someone to go through just to teach for very little money, most often on a part-time basis. Some of the places covered don't even pay adjuncts for their attendance at orientation.

1 person liked this. Like Reply



**bethmason64** 3 hours ago

I am an adjunct-turned-lecturer at a large state university. After having attended something similar at my school when I first started out, I must say that being able to spend that block of time within my own department, and with the professors with whom I will interact, would be a far better way to become "oriented" to the campus!

Luckily, the philosophy department where I teach is friendly and accessible, so I had no trouble meeting colleagues and fitting in, and the Dean's door is literally always open. I have found this to be far more helpful in getting me settled in and acclimated to my specific locus of function. Our department's administrative assistant was and is very helpful and knowledgeable, and her hands-on assistance has been far more valuable than attending orientation and doing ice-breakers and team-building or collaboration exercises. Once I got settled in, I felt ready to take on exploring the campus and other departments. Doing it all marathon-style in one day is sensory overload, I believe.

I'd bet if any of the attendees of the above-mentioned sessions felt free to be open and candid, they would have preferred the department-specific help like I got, to going to an anonymous and extended workshop.

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