Building Faculty Capacity through High-Impact Practices: The Eric Grosse Memorial Fellowship for Part-Time Faculty Development

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.52938/tales.v5i1.3487

ABSTRACT

Over the past 2 decades the role of part-time faculty in U.S. higher education has grown dramatically. Today, contingent instructors—most of them part-time—make up over half of the instructional workforce at American colleges and universities, and at community colleges they often account for 60-70% of the teaching staff (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014; Jaeger & Eagan, 2009). Despite their essential contributions to student learning, part-time faculty are frequently excluded from campus professional development programs, lack adequate institutional support, and are rarely integrated into the broader academic community (Kezar & Maxey, 2014). This gap not only undermines the professional growth and satisfaction of contingent faculty, but it also risks compromising student success, particularly for historically underserved student populations who disproportionately enroll in community colleges (Eagan & Jaeger, 2008).

Numerous studies have underscored the relationship between faculty development and improvements in student learning outcomes, engagement, and retention (Condon et al., 2016; Stes et al., 2010). Yet, institutional investments in faculty development often prioritize full-time, tenure-track faculty, leaving part-time instructors with fewer resources, fewer pathways to pedagogical innovation, and limited opportunities to reflect on their teaching practice in community with peers (Kezar, 2013; Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006). As Kezar and Sam (2013) argue, creating inclusive,

meaningful professional development for contingent faculty is not simply a matter of equity but of institutional effectiveness.

The Eric Grosse Memorial Fellowship (Fellowship) at Montgomery College addresses this urgent need by providing a structured, reflective, and evidence-informed professional development program specifically for part-time faculty. Now entering its third year, the Fellowship leverages the 7 principles for good practice in undergraduate education (Chickering & Gamson, 1987) and intentionally applies high-impact practices (HIPs)—including collaborative learning, reflective writing, and capstone projects—to the development of teaching practice. While HIPs are most often used to enhance undergraduate learning (Kuh, 2008; Kuh & O'Donnell, 2013), their adaptation for faculty development represents an innovative and underexplored approach to improving college teaching, particularly for instructors working under contingent conditions.

This article examines the design, implementation, and outcomes of the Fellowship over its first 2 years. Drawing on program documents, participant reflections, and capstone presentations, we argue that the Fellowship offers a promising, replicable model for supporting contingent faculty through sustained, high-impact professional development. In doing so, it not only strengthens individual teaching practice but also builds a more inclusive and learning-centered academic culture.

HOW TO CITE

Miller, P., & Swanson, J. E. (2025). Building Faculty Capacity through High-Impact Practices: The Eric Grosse Memorial Fellowship for Part-Time Faculty Development. Teaching and Learning Excellence through Scholarship, 5(1). https://doi.org/10.52938/tales.v5i1.3487

Featured Tale

Building Faculty Capacity through High-Impact Practices: The Eric Grosse Memorial Fellowship for Part-Time Faculty Development

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Over the past 2 decades the role of part-time faculty in U.S. higher education has grown dramatically. Today, contingent instructors—most of them part-time—make up over half of the instructional workforce at American colleges and universities, and at community colleges they often account for 60-70% of the teaching staff (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014; Jaeger & Eagan, 2009). Despite their essential contributions to student learning, part-time faculty are frequently excluded from campus professional development programs, lack adequate institutional support, and are rarely integrated into the broader academic community (Kezar & Maxey, 2014). This gap not only undermines the professional growth and satisfaction of contingent faculty, but it also risks compromising student success, particularly for historically underserved student populations who disproportionately enroll in community colleges (Eagan & Jaeger, 2008).

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This article examines the design, implementation, and outcomes of the Fellowship over its first 2 years. Drawing on program documents, participant reflections, and capstone presentations, we argue that the Fellowship offers a promising, replicable model for supporting contingent faculty through sustained, high-impact professional development. In doing so, it not only strengthens individual teaching practice but also builds a more inclusive and learning-centered academic culture.

Program Rationale and Theoretical Framework

The development of the Fellowship was guided by the recognition that part-time faculty face unique structural and professional challenges that require tailored, intentional professional development approaches. Research consistently shows that contingent faculty experience higher levels of professional isolation, limited institutional access, and fewer opportunities for instructional development compared to their full-time counterparts (Kezar, 2013; Kezar & Maxey, 2014; Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006). These inequities matter not only for faculty morale and retention but also for student outcomes: students in classes taught by part-time faculty report lower levels of engagement and academic success,

particularly when instructors lack access to institutional supports (Eagan & Jaeger, 2008; Jaeger & Eagan, 2009).

The Fellowship was designed to respond to these challenges by creating a professional development experience specifically for part-time faculty—one that is intellectually rigorous, practically relevant, community-oriented, and reflective. It is intentionally designed at the intersection of multiple theoretical frameworks: adult learning theory, reflective practice, research-based pedagogical principles, HIPs, and communities of practice. Together, these frameworks guide the program's design and provide a strong foundation for its efforts to support part-time faculty in improving their teaching, strengthening their professional identity, and enhancing student success.

Adult Learning Theory

Anchored in principles of adult learning theory, or andragogy, the Fellowship recognizes that adult learners bring rich prior experiences, are self-directed, value learning that is relevant to their immediate professional contexts, and benefit from active involvement in the learning process (Merriam & Bierema, 2013; Knowles et al., 2015). These principles informed both the program design and facilitation strategies: faculty participants are treated as co-creators of knowledge, assignments are tied to their own teaching practice, and the program balances individual reflection with collaborative learning.

Reflective Practice and Practitioner Inquiry

Grounded in the tradition of reflective practice as articulated by Schön (1983), the Fellowship encourages participants to examine their assumptions as expanded in more recent work on practitioner inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). By maintaining reflective journals, engaging in peer discussion, and completing structured assignments, participants are encouraged to examine their own assumptions, surface tacit knowledge, and make intentional, evidence-based changes to their teaching. Reflective practice has been identified as a key mechanism for translating faculty development into lasting pedagogical improvement (Condon et al., 2016; Stes et al., 2010).

The 7 Principles for Good Practice

At the heart of the Fellowship is Chickering and Gamson's (1987) Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education, a framework

that has shaped the field of instructional improvement for over 3 decades. These principles—encouraging faculty-student contact, developing reciprocity and cooperation among students, using active learning, providing prompt feedback, emphasizing time on task, communicating high expectations, and respecting diverse talents and ways of learning—are rooted in empirical research and offer faculty clear, actionable strategies to improve student learning. By structuring the Fellowship around these principles, the program provides participants with both a theoretical foundation and a practical roadmap for effective teaching.

HIPs in Faculty Development

HIPs have become a cornerstone in the discourse of undergraduate education. Originally articulated by George Kuh (2008), HIPs refer to a set of pedagogical approaches — such as learning communities, writing-intensive courses, undergraduate research, service learning, internships, and capstone projects — that have been shown to promote deep learning, engagement, and student persistence across a wide range of institutions and student populations. What distinguishes HIPs is not only their emphasis on active learning but also their ability to foster sustained effort over time, expose students to diverse perspectives, and create opportunities for applied practice, meaningful feedback, and reflective thinking.

While the majority of research on HIPs has understandably focused on their application to student learning, the Fellowship offers an innovative extension of this concept by embedding the principles and mechanisms of HIPs into the professional development of faculty, particularly part-time instructors. Within the context of faculty development, the application of HIPs is both timely and underexplored. Traditional approaches to faculty development often rely on one-time workshops, short seminars, or passive dissemination of teaching resources. While these approaches may raise awareness of new techniques, they rarely lead to lasting changes in teaching practice or professional identity. In contrast, high-impact faculty development practices, much like their undergraduate counterparts, engage participants in extended, meaningful, and often transformative learning experiences. They foster intellectual engagement, encourage experimentation, and create a sense of belonging within a professional learning community — elements that are particularly critical for contingent faculty, who frequently experience professional marginalization (Kezar & Maxey, 2014). Collaborative

learning, writing-intensive practice, and a culminating capstone project are all integrated into the Fellowship's design, thereby applying to faculty the same principles of engagement, relevance, and sustained effort that have been shown to benefit students (Kuh & O'Donnell, 2013).

Several key features of the Fellowship parallel the defining characteristics of HIPs. First, the program is intentionally sustained over seven weeks, requiring participants to invest sustained time and effort in grappling with complex pedagogical concepts and applying them to their own practice. This extended engagement contrasts sharply with the episodic nature of many development offerings and aligns with research showing that long-duration programs are more likely to lead to meaningful change (Condon et al., 2016; Steinert et al., 2006).

Second, the Fellowship emphasizes applied learning by requiring participants to design, implement, and assess instructional strategies aligned with the Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education. Faculty are not passive recipients of content; they are active practitioners who test, adapt, and reflect on their teaching within the program's supportive structure. This applied focus reflects the essential logic of HIPs, where learning is deepened when it is integrated with real-world tasks and reflective practice (Kuh & O'Donnell, 2013).

Third, the Fellowship places a strong emphasis on collaboration and peer learning. Through structured discussions, peer feedback, and the capstone presentation, participants engage with colleagues across disciplines and campuses, sharing experiences, challenges, and insights. This collaborative element creates a vibrant learning community, fostering professional connection and reducing the isolation that often characterizes part-time faculty work. Research on faculty learning communities and communities of practice has consistently underscored the importance of collaborative engagement in fostering instructional improvement and professional satisfaction (Beach & Cox, 2009; Wenger, 1998).

Reflective practice is another central element of the Fellowship's design that aligns with high-impact principles. Through weekly reflective journaling, participants are encouraged to engage in systematic, critical examination of their teaching assumptions, strategies, and outcomes. This reflective work supports the development of adaptive expertise and pedagogical self-awareness, both of which are essential for sustained instructional growth (Schön, 1983; Brookfield, 2017). By making reflection

a regular and expected part of the learning process, the Fellowship moves beyond surface-level change and fosters deeper shifts in participants' orientations toward their teaching.

Serving as a culminating signature experience, the capstone presentation invites participants to synthesize their learning within the Fellowship, mirroring the role of capstone projects in undergraduate education. It requires faculty to synthesize their learning, articulate their pedagogical development, and publicly share their work with peers and institutional leaders. This public dimension not only heightens faculty accountability but also reinforces their professional identity as scholarly teachers whose contributions deserve recognition. For many participants, the capstone presentation becomes a turning point in how they view themselves as educators, helping to counteract the invisibility that often accompanies part-time teaching roles.

Importantly, the adaptation of HIPs for faculty development carries implications beyond the individual level. By embedding HIPs into professional learning, institutions can cultivate a culture of teaching excellence, collaboration, and innovation that extends across all levels of faculty, including those who are often excluded from institutional life. Such programs signal a deep commitment to inclusivity and professional equity, ensuring that part-time instructors are not only supported but actively empowered as members of the academic community.

There is growing recognition that faculty development programs that incorporate these "high-impact" characteristics—especially those that foster sustained engagement, cross-disciplinary dialogue, and opportunities for public sharing—are more likely to produce meaningful changes in teaching practice (Condon et al., 2016; Felten et al., 2013). By embedding HIPs into the Fellowship, the program increases the likelihood that participants will not only acquire new knowledge but also translate it into transformative changes in their classrooms.

Communities of Practice and Faculty Learning Communities

Drawing on the concept of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) and faculty learning communities (Cox, 2004), the Fellowship fosters cross-disciplinary exchange. Research on FLCs has shown that faculty benefit from collaborative, cross-disciplinary spaces where they can share ideas, reflect on practice, and provide mutual support (Beach & Cox, 2009). For

part-time faculty, who often experience professional isolation, the Fellowship cohort serves as an essential peer network that reduces marginalization and fosters a stronger sense of belonging to the academic community.

Fellowship Design and Curriculum

The Fellowship was carefully designed to meet the specific needs of part-time faculty, providing them with a structured yet flexible professional development experience that is both theoretically grounded and practically applicable. Spanning 7 weeks, the program dedicates each week to exploring one of Chickering and Gamson's (1987) principles. These principles — encourage contact between students and faculty, develop reciprocity and cooperation among students, use active learning techniques, give prompt feedback, emphasize time on task, communicate high expectations, and respect diverse talents and ways of learning — provide the conceptual foundation for the entire fellowship.

This weekly structure allows faculty participants to immerse themselves in each principle with intentional depth. This design reflects an understanding of the competing demands faced by part-time faculty, many of whom are balancing multiple teaching appointments, other employment, or personal responsibilities. By focusing on one principle at a time, the Fellowship fosters deeper engagement and reduces cognitive overload, making meaningful professional learning possible even in the context of time constraints.

A central feature of the Fellowship is its 5-part learning process, which scaffolds participants' experience from theory to application. Each week begins with a reflective exercise that prompts faculty to draw upon their prior knowledge or teaching experience related to the week's principle. This approach draws on adult learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of connecting new learning to the learner's existing expertise and professional context. Participants then engage with carefully curated theoretical and practical resources, including scholarly readings, multimedia materials, and examples from practice, which introduce them to research-based strategies and expand their understanding of the principle in action.

Dialogue and collaboration play a central role in the learning process. Participants in the Fellowship participate in online discussions and structured conversations with peers, sharing their interpretations,

classroom strategies, and challenges. This collaborative engagement fosters a sense of professional community and belonging, which is especially vital for part-time faculty who often experience professional isolation. Through these peer interactions, participants can broaden their pedagogical repertoires, gain exposure to new disciplinary perspectives, and troubleshoot potential barriers to implementation.

At the heart of each week's curriculum is an applied assignment that invites participants to translate theory into practice. These assignments are intentionally designed to be both low-stakes and highly relevant, ensuring that faculty can integrate new approaches directly into their courses without feeling overwhelmed. For example, participants may be asked to design a collaborative activity, develop a strategy for providing timely feedback, or create a rubric that communicates high expectations to students. Each assignment is crafted to align with the realities of teaching in diverse community college classrooms, making the fellowship both rigorous and pragmatic.

Reflection is a continuous thread running throughout the program. At the end of each module, participants complete a reflective journal entry in which they synthesize what they have learned, document their successes and challenges, and consider how they might further adapt their practice. This sustained reflective practice draws on the tradition of practitioner inquiry and reflective teaching, which has been shown to support the translation of faculty development into long-term pedagogical change (Schön, 1983; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

Culminating in a capstone presentation, the program offers faculty a chance to synthesize their learning and celebrate their accomplishments. Each faculty member delivers a 20-minute presentation demonstrating how they have applied the 7 principles to their teaching. This presentation is not only an accountability measure, ensuring that learning is applied and sustained, but also an opportunity for public scholarship. For many part-time faculty, the capstone marks one of the first occasions they have been invited to publicly share their teaching work with colleagues and institutional leaders. This experience fosters a sense of professional agency and scholarly identity, helping participants see themselves not just as instructors but as members of a broader community of practice.

Throughout the Fellowship, participants receive robust pedagogical and technical support. Experienced faculty developers provide individualized

feedback, guide online discussions, and offer coaching tailored to each fellow's needs. The program is delivered through the college's learning management system, which ensures accessibility and enables participants to engage from multiple locations and schedules. Community-building strategies, such as weekly announcements, informal check-ins, and peer encouragement, are woven into the design to help sustain engagement and foster connection across what is often a dispersed and diverse cohort. Importantly, the Fellowship's design reflects widely accepted best practices in faculty development. Research in the field has consistently emphasized the importance of active and applied learning, sustained engagement over time, opportunities for reflection, and collaboration with peers (Condon et al., 2016; Steinert et al., 2006). By integrating these elements, the Fellowship offers a model that is both effective and adaptable. Its intentional combination of theory, practice, reflection, and community positions it as a replicable program that other institutions might adopt to support the professional development and pedagogical innovation of their own part-time faculty.

Assessment and Outcomes

The assessment strategy for the Fellowship was designed to capture both the immediate and longer-term effects of the program on participants' teaching practices, professional identity, and engagement with the institution. Recognizing that meaningful change in pedagogy is often gradual and multifaceted, the assessment plan adopted a mixed-methods approach, integrating participant self-assessments, reflective writing, peer feedback, and facilitator observations. This design allowed the program team to assess not only what participants learned but also how they applied that learning in the context of their classrooms and professional roles.

At the start of the Fellowship, participants completed a self-assessment survey in which they reflected on their current teaching practices, confidence in applying evidence-based strategies, and familiarity with the Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education. This baseline data provided important insights into participants' initial pedagogical profiles and allowed the program facilitators to tailor aspects of the program to meet the needs of each cohort. Midway through the program, informal check-ins and discussion board exchanges offered formative feedback on participants' experiences, engagement, and areas where additional support was needed. At the

program's conclusion, participants completed a post-Fellowship survey that revisited the initial self-assessment domains, allowing for a comparison of growth over time.

Perhaps the richest data source emerged from the reflective journals that participants maintained throughout the Fellowship. In these journals, participants documented their thought processes, struggles, triumphs, and insights as they experimented with applying the Seven Principles in their own teaching. These reflections offered a window into the lived experience of pedagogical change, revealing how participants moved from theoretical understanding to practical application. Themes emerging from the journal analyses included increased intentionality in lesson planning, greater confidence in trying new instructional strategies, heightened sensitivity to student diversity and inclusion, and a deeper commitment to seeking student feedback on teaching practices. The journals also highlighted participants' growing awareness of themselves as scholarly practitioners, capable of critically examining and refining their teaching in response to evidence and reflection.

The capstone presentations provided an additional and highly visible form of assessment. Each participant was asked to synthesize their learning into a 20-minute presentation that illustrated how they had applied the 7 principles in their teaching, what impact these changes had on student engagement or outcomes, and what they planned to pursue in the future. The capstone presentations served as both a summative assessment of participants' progress and a formative experience in their professional development, as the act of presenting publicly encouraged further consolidation of their learning. Peer and facilitator feedback during these presentations reinforced the sense of community developed during the program and offered additional perspectives on participants' growth and future directions.

Preliminary analysis of survey data and qualitative reflections from the first 2 Fellowship cohorts points to several notable outcomes. Participants reported substantial increases in their confidence using active learning techniques, providing prompt and constructive feedback, designing inclusive learning experiences, and engaging students in ways that foster meaningful learning. Faculty described concrete changes to their syllabi, assignment designs, grading practices, and classroom activities that aligned with the principles studied during the program. Many participants also noted a marked shift in their understanding of

the faculty role, describing themselves as more engaged, reflective, and connected to the college community.

One of the most powerful outcomes emerging from the assessment data was the development of a sense of belonging among part-time faculty participants. Participants repeatedly reported that the experience of working alongside peers in a sustained, collaborative environment was profoundly affirming, particularly in light of the professional isolation they often experienced in their teaching roles. For some, the Fellowship marked the first time they had been invited to engage in faculty development that centered their voices, acknowledged their expertise, and validated their contributions to the academic mission of the college. This sense of belonging, while difficult to quantify, is an important outcome in its own right, given the well-documented challenges of engaging and retaining part-time instructors within institutional life.

Looking forward, the assessment plan for future Fellowship cycles includes several enhancements to strengthen the evidence base on program impact. These include gathering student feedback on instructional changes implemented by fellows, conducting classroom observations to triangulate self-reported practices, and tracking participants' continued engagement in professional development activities beyond the program. These additional measures will provide a richer and more comprehensive picture of how the Fellowship influences teaching, learning, and institutional culture over time.

Discussion and Conclusion

Offering an innovative approach to advancing faculty development, the Fellowship has strengthened our institution's efforts to promote teaching excellence, particularly for part-time instructors who have often been overlooked. As participant reflections and assessment data suggest, the program has strengthened individual teaching practices, deepened professional identity, and fostered a meaningful sense of connection among part-time faculty. These outcomes have important implications for institutional priorities in areas such as instructional quality, faculty equity, and student success.

Central to the Fellowship's impact is its clear alignment with research-based principles of effective teaching. By grounding the curriculum in Chickering and Gamson's (1987) *Seven Principles for Good Practice*, the program provides faculty with a coherent framework that is both

evidence-informed and immediately applicable to their classrooms. This sustained focus enables participants to move beyond surface-level engagement and supports a deeper exploration of how pedagogical strategies can shape student learning. Rather than encountering these ideas through disconnected workshops or resource guides, participants engage with them in a way that builds confidence, encourages experimentation, and nurtures reflective practice.

A defining feature of the Fellowship is the integration of HIPs into faculty development. The program's emphasis on applied learning, collaborative dialogue, and reflective inquiry mirrors the kinds of educational experiences that have long been shown to enhance student learning. Faculty are not only learning about best practices but are also actively testing and refining them in their own teaching. This iterative process, combined with the accountability built into the capstone presentations, fosters a sense of ownership over pedagogical change. Such an approach resonates with scholarship on faculty development, which highlights the importance of engaging educators as active partners in the change process rather than passive recipients of information.

An equally important dimension of the Fellowship is its capacity to cultivate professional belonging among part-time faculty. Many participants describe the program as their first opportunity to engage meaningfully with peers across disciplines, to have their voices heard, and to feel valued as members of the academic community. Given the longstanding challenges of isolation and invisibility faced by contingent faculty, this outcome is particularly significant. The Fellowship signals to participants—and to the broader institution—that part-time instructors are not peripheral contributors, but rather central to the teaching mission of the college. This shift in perception carries the potential to strengthen both faculty morale and institutional culture.

Importantly, the Fellowship's impact extends to students who benefit from the improvements in instructional design, classroom engagement, and inclusive practices that participating faculty implement. Although the program's primary goal is faculty growth, its ripple effects are seen in the creation of more intentional, student-centered learning environments. When part-time instructors are equipped and supported to teach at their best, the benefits extend far beyond the individual faculty member to enrich the educational experience of students.

As the Fellowship continues to evolve, several important questions emerge for future development. One area of exploration involves the long-term sustainability of changes introduced during the program. While self-reported outcomes suggest promising shifts in teaching practices, future assessment efforts might track how participants' approaches evolve over time and how they continue to engage in professional development beyond the program. Incorporating student perspectives and classroom observations into the assessment strategy could provide further insight into how faculty learning translates into student outcomes.

Scaling the Fellowship to reach larger groups of faculty is another consideration. As demand for meaningful professional development increases, colleges will need to explore models that preserve the program's depth and relational strength while making it accessible to a broader population. This may involve developing alumni networks, creating advanced learning opportunities, or integrating key elements of the Fellowship into the broader portfolio of faculty development offerings.

The Fellowship's success also raises broader institutional questions. Supporting contingent faculty requires more than professional development alone; it calls for comprehensive efforts to improve working conditions, compensation, integration into shared governance, and access to resources. Professional development, while essential, is one part of a larger strategy to promote equity and inclusion within the faculty ranks. Programs like the Fellowship demonstrate what is possible when institutions intentionally invest in the growth and recognition of all their educators.

Overall, the Fellowship illustrates how thoughtfully designed professional development can spark meaningful change at both the individual and institutional levels. By weaving together evidence-based pedagogy, collaborative learning, applied practice, and public scholarship, the program not only equips part-time faculty with new tools and strategies but also reaffirms their essential role in the life of the institution. As higher education continues to navigate the intersecting challenges of equity, quality, and student success, models like this offer a compelling example of how investing in faculty can yield broad and lasting impact.

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