

Support part-time faculty to boost student retention, completion rates

By Joan Hope, Ph.D., Editor

CHICAGO — Faculty members have a major influence on student satisfaction. That can be especially true at a community college where many students come to campus just long enough to attend classes.

At Montgomery College in Maryland, Sanjay Rai, senior vice president for academic affairs, realized the institution couldn't do anything about increasing graduation and student success rates without bringing the part-time faculty on board with efforts. That's according to Antonio "Tango" Thomas, director of the Institute for Part-Time Faculty Engagement and Support at MC. Thomas and Mike Mills, vice president for E-Learning, Innovation and Teaching Excellence, described the initiatives now in place at MC to support part-time faculty members. They spoke at a session at the American Association of Community Colleges annual convention.

At MC, 70 percent of the faculty are part-time, Thomas said. They teach 60 percent of credit courses and 96 percent of noncredit courses. Their positions vary from part-time faculty who teach on a regular basis and have their own offices to professionals in the subject fields who teach just one course. Officials wanted to include all these instructors in professional development, Mills said.

MC officials use the term "part-time" rather than "adjunct" faculty because that indicates that the only difference between those faculty members and full-time faculty is the number of courses they teach.

Efforts to support part-time faculty members include:

- **Onboarding/orientation.** The onboarding process is designed to ensure that part-time faculty members can function during the first day of class, Thomas said. It includes setting the professors up for payroll, ID cards and benefits. They are eligible for the college's supplemental retirement plan, Thomas said.

The orientation program covers parking, access to and location of classrooms, mailboxes, textbooks, syllabus requirements, and the class roster.

But the onboarding and orientation processes go beyond just helping instructors survive their first day. The part-time faculty members are also informed about student success initiatives at MC. They learn about the student profile, including that students are from more than 100 countries, so instructors need to be sensitive to students' needs. Also, they learn about MC 2020, the president's initiatives that each unit must be in line with.

Plus, new part-time faculty members learn about academic affairs initiatives such as the new general education and general studies program. The new program includes a critical thinking component, and many classes have signature assignments. Professors learn to structure their courses to help students succeed on those assignments. For example, if a research paper is required, instructors should set due dates for different sections of the paper rather than having it all due at once. Structuring due dates lowers the percentages of students who earn Ds and Fs and who withdraw, Thomas said.

- **Space and facilities utilization.** Each campus has a Part-time Faculty Resource Center that allows instructors to meet with students, check their email, grade papers and meet with colleagues. The centers include equipment such as scanners and printers.

As construction projects take place, space for part-time faculty members is considered in planning, Thomas said. For example, one campus is adding booths where part-time faculty members can meet with students.

- **Virtual presence.** The Institute for Part-Time Faculty Engagement and Support's website provides instructors with the information they need without their having to hunt for it. For example, they can download the Faculty Handbook, learn the schedules for the faculty associates on each campus who are assigned to provide them with guidance, and follow links to important information such as the academic calendar and the disability services office's website. *Visit the site at <http://cms.montgomerycollege.edu/Part-TimeFacultyInstitute/>.*

- **Engagement.** MC officials encourage part-time faculty members to do more than just show up on campus to teach their classes, Thomas said. They encourage the instructors to get involved in tasks including:

- **Academic restructuring.** Part-time faculty members can serve on a project to enhance college-wide consistency and cooperation with the goal of supporting student success. For example, the process for taking a make-up exam should be the same on each campus.

- **General education.** To ensure that students are well-rounded, MC has made gen ed part of every degree program. Part-time instructors can join in discussions about how to implement gen ed in their subject areas.

- **Committees.** Part-time faculty members

Divisions work together to support part-time faculty

When officials at Montgomery College decided to boost support for part-time faculty members, they relied on existing resources and created new ones.

The E-Learning, Innovation, and Teaching Excellence team, headed by vice president Mike Mills, offers training sessions and other types of professional development.

ELITE is focused on providing instructional professional development and learning technology support. The team leads collegewide academic initiatives.

ELITE had always invited part-time faculty members to attend professional development opportunities along with full-time instructors, Mills said. But the team had not focused on just part-time faculty members as their work relates to student success. Now, ELITE offers workshops for them in the evenings and online to make it convenient for them to participate. Officials are researching what interventions help limit the number of D, F and W grades students earn so they can offer training on those, Mills said.

ELITE also offers opportunities for networking. For example, a three-hour Saturday morning retreat on “The Love of Teaching” gave part-time faculty members an opportunity to share what brought them to teaching and why they continue to teach, Mills said.

To provide further support to part-time faculty members, MC officials created the Institute for Part-Time Faculty Engagement and Support. IPTFES, led by director Antonio “Tango” Thomas, serves as the authoritative source on certain human resources issues including:

- **Rank advancement.** Part-time faculty members at MC can advance to a higher rank by taking professional development courses.
- **Assignment and appointment requests.** Officials make a good-faith effort to give faculty members the same load each term.
- **Professional development grants.** Part-time faculty members can apply for up to \$600 to take advantage of professional development opportunities such as conferences.
- **Opportunities for full-time employment.** Thomas and the IPTFES staff share information about opportunities that arise.

IPTFES also provides part-time faculty members with help solving problems related to computer, technical and facilities concerns. It serves as a focal point for issues that impact academics. Plus, it assists academic and counseling departments in communicating more effectively with part-time faculty members. ■

might serve on the curriculum, academic regulations or academic master plan committees. Because many of them are professionals, including those in high-level positions such as judges, they know what is coming in their fields, so it’s helpful to have them on the curriculum committee.

- **Professional development.** Officials encourage part-time faculty members to participate in training sessions such as learning styles, portfolio preparation and teaching techniques. Training sessions are also available about the college’s student success and academic affairs initiatives.

- **Recognition/rewards.** Part-time faculty members are recognized by being listed in the college’s online directories, department websites and schedule of classes. The college acknowledges their accomplishments at the college and in their disciplines and/or professions.

The college also created awards programs to honor them. Each year, the winners of four awards for Excellence in Teaching or Excellence in Counseling and Advising receive \$2,000 each. The winners of two awards for Excellence in Scholarly or Professional Accomplishments also receive \$2,000 each.

And the Montgomery College Part-time Professor of the Year is awarded \$5,000.

- **Institute for Part-Time Faculty Engagement and Support structure.** Thomas, director of IPTFES, provides long-range and strategic planning. He also manages the Part-Time Faculty Center on each campus and the associates who work with faculty on the campuses.

The part-time faculty associates are part-time faculty members who provide resources and guidance to their peers. They also report serious issues to Thomas. New associates are chosen each year, with one carrying over from the previous year to provide continuity. They have knowledge of technological tools that can be used inside or outside the classroom, educational practices at MC, services offered to MC employees, processes for accessing and completing forms such as those required by human resources, professional development offerings, and MC’s initiatives. The associates are given course releases for this work.

A part-time faculty advisory team has 30 members who provide a sounding board, assistance, and recommendations concerning human resources, facilities, professional development and more. ■