

Online Faculty Learning Communities for Part-Time Faculty

The Future of Faculty Development at a Regional University

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Abstract

Although there is a significant body of research that highlights the benefits of faculty development, part-time faculty may not have opportunities to participate in sustained, on campus faculty development activities. This paper explores the creation of online faculty learning communities (OFLCs) to address the developmental needs of part-time faculty at a multi-campus, regional university. A critical review design was employed which examined the potential benefits, barriers, and technology toolsets needed for the implementation of OFLCs. The analysis revealed that OFLCs can provide sustained technical and teaching support for part-time faculty; however, barriers such as buy-in, attrition, scheduling conflicts, and competence in the use of technology may impact widespread adoption. Recommendations are presented which serve as a call to action for the creation and fostering of OFLCs at the regional institution.

Keywords: online faculty learning communities (OFLCs), faculty development, part-time faculty in the Caribbean

Introduction

Engaging in faculty development activities has been touted as important for the development of faculties' teaching scholarship. These activities usually introduce participants to new teaching strategies or curricular materials and take the form of workshops and short courses. Short-term workshops, however, do not have a sustained impact because they expect participants to move from knowing nothing (or little) about an approach, to applying it, in a single step, and are one-off interactions.

Pimmel (2013) argued that recent faculty development models had limited impact, given their reliance on the “develop-disseminate” model, where a small group must convince others to use the strategies and curricular materials they developed. This model typically does not lead to the wide distribution of education innovations due to barriers such as culture and incompatible context (Dancy et al. 2017). Moreover, Dancy et al. (2019) posited that short-term workshops or even a series of professional development activities cannot adequately support faculty in the development of research-based instructional strategies due to the constraints of the “develop-disseminate” model.

Alternatively, Price et al. (2021) postulated that sustained professional development, of more than fourteen hours, spread over time, was important for change at the K-12 level; and longer term, community-based faculty professional development has shown promise in higher education. This was also the conclusion of Pimmel (2013) who posited that sustained approaches, such as learning communities (which are longer term and community-based), are more effective for faculty development. To provide better access to these learning communities for faculty, they are either held in a hybrid format or fully online (Brooks 2010).

Although the benefits of faculty development have been described in the literature, part-time faculty may not have opportunities to participate in sustained, on campus faculty development activities due to time and schedule conflicts (Christie 2016). As a result, the overall quality of the academic programmes they participate in may be impacted, especially at institutions that rely heavily on part-time staff. Moreover, the cost associated with the training of part-time faculty using conventional faculty development efforts such as workshops and short courses may prove to be both high and ineffective since these development efforts do not have sustained impact. This supposition is supported by Velez (2009) who reasoned that the largest investment should be in faculty if the quality of the programmes they teach is expected to be high.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the creation of online faculty learning communities (OFLCs) to address the developmental needs of part-time faculty at a multi-campus, regional university. Specifically, the benefits, barriers, and technology toolset required to implement OFLCs at this regional university are discussed and suitable recommendations proposed.

Given the financial constraints and cost-cutting measures that have impacted part-time academic staff at the regional university, bearing in mind the significant dependence on part-time academics to run the programmes offered, it is essential for cost effective measures to be formulated that can train and maintain a cadre of highly skilled part-time faculty members. The move to OFLCs for part-time faculty members addresses these concerns in a cost-effective manner, while providing significant potential benefits to the university, such as increased research output in teaching and learning scholarship.

The remainder of this paper presents the setting of the study, an overview of faculty development in the context and the applicability of OFLCs, the methodology of the study, the results, the discussion, the conclusion and finally a set of recommendations.

The Setting of the Study

The University of the West Indies (The UWI) is home to over 50,000 students across five campuses. These campuses are: the Mona Campus (Jamaica), the St. Augustine Campus (Trinidad and Tobago), the Cave Hill Campus (Barbados), the Five Islands Campus (Antigua and Barbuda) and the Open Campus (which is an online campus that serves sixteen countries in the English-Speaking Caribbean) (<https://www.uwi.edu/about.php>).

A full complement of teaching staff is employed by the university, comprising both full-time and part-time academics. Part-time academics support many academic programmes at the university. For example, the Open Campus hires approximately 500 e-tutors, on short-term contracts (The UWI, n.d.) and the Cave Hill Campus hires temporary staff to ensure adequate course coverage (Radio Jamaica News 2014). Ellis, Adamson, and Miller (2012) however, cautioned that although part-time faculty are used worldwide, leading to cost savings, the quality of test items created and the lack of timely feedback was a major concern.

Moreover, most of the part-time faculty, employed by an unnamed University in Jamaica, reported that they had never been invited to a departmental meeting, while a smaller number stated that their work schedules/commitments prevented

them from attending these meetings. At the same time, many of these part-time faculty indicated that they were willing to collaborate and actively participate in the planning process. Ellis, Adamson, and Miller (2012) recommended that the university provide training in test writing, pedagogy, and assessment and evaluation. Importantly, these part-time faculty would have been drawn from the available pool of part-time academics in Jamaica.

The Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), which recently celebrated 30 years of existence, is responsible for faculty development at The UWI (<https://uwitv.org/uwi-news/vice-chancellors-forum-to-discuss-the-uwi-becoming-a-world-class-university-and-contributions-of-faculty-development>). CETL engages in many professional development activities, including consultations, seminars, workshops, informal courses, and the Postgraduate Certificate in University Teacher and Learning (CUTL) (<https://www.cavehill.uwi.edu/cetl/about/about.aspx>) and training in educational technologies, such as Zoom, Moodle, and Microsoft Teams (<https://uwi.edu/remote/tools/zoom>) (<https://uwi.edu/0365/>) at the Mona, St. Augustine and Cave Hill campuses (<https://www.cavehill.uwi.edu/cetl/educational-technology.aspx>) (<https://sta.uwi.edu/cetl/>) (<https://www.mona.uwi.edu/cetl/>). The CUTL is mandatory only for new full-time hires (Thurab-Nkhosi 2019).

Teaching Awards have been established across The UWI, such as The UWI/Guardian Group Premium Teaching Awards, the Principal's Award for Excellence and the Vice-Chancellor's Award for Excellence (<https://sta.uwi.edu/cetl/uwi-guardian-group-premium-teaching-awards>) (<https://www.uwi.edu/vcawards/>) (<https://dominicanewsonline.com/news/homepage/news/general/uwi-open-campus-dominica-wins-principals-award-for-best-performing-department-2016/>). Significantly, these awards are only available to full-time staff.

At the same time, The UWI has engaged in many cost-cutting exercises, due to prevailing economic climates, that have impacted part-time staff operations. Just over a decade ago, a JMD1 Billion cut in government funding resulted in a decrease of part-time staff at the Mona Campus (Reid 2011). A similar cost cutting measure led to the reduction of part-time teaching staff contracts, at the St. Augustine campus, from one year to nine months (Lindo 2022). Despite this, the percentage of part-time teaching appointments at the St. Augustine Campus rose by 32% (to 643 staff) in the 2021–2022 academic year (The UWI 2021) (the highest reported increase within five years).

At the Cave Hill Campus, reductions in the operational budget resulted in stringent monitoring of part-time hires (Madden 2021). The general directive at

The UWI is that part-time staff would only be brought in when full-time staff in the departments have reached their threshold (Dowrich-Phillips 2021).

Faculty Development at The UWI

Faculty development efforts are not foreign to The UWI and have been receiving increasing attention over the last two decades (Thurab-Nkhosi 2019). Most of these efforts have been initiated through or in collaboration with the Instructional Development Units (the former name for CETL) of the UWI campuses (Thurab-Nkhosi 2019; Walcott and Grant 2006a, 2006b, 2010).

Several of the 150-teaching staff who participated in a study of the CUTL programme stated that more training should be provided in the use of technology for teaching (Thurab-Nkhosi 2019).

Furthermore, Thurab-Nkhosi (2019) suggested that sustained support was not provided for the delivery of blended courses and the use of online tools/resources, given that support stopped after the completion of the programme. Additionally, many faculty felt that follow-up sessions/refresher courses or longer course time frames were necessary.

Further, Thurab-Nkhosi (2019) posited that the St. Augustine Campus had achieved Level 3 of Fink (2003) typology of four levels of acceptance of faculty development within countries. In this typology, the four levels are: (1) Little or no faculty development, (2) Voluntary faculty development activities, (3) Almost universal faculty development, where activities are mandatory for new staff, (4) Continuous faculty development.

Developing learning communities at The UWI

In the community model, novices can learn from experienced faculty through collaboration, much like apprenticeship (Barab, MaKinster, and Scheckler 2003). The fusing of individuals to communities who work collaboratively has been dubbed communities of practice (CoPs). This term was defined by Barab, MaKinster, and Scheckler (2003) as “a persistent, sustained social network of individuals who share and develop an overlapping knowledge base, set of beliefs, values, history and experience focused on a common practice and/or mutual enterprise” (p. 2). Efforts have already been made to create learning communities for part-time faculty at The UWI. One such effort, discussed by Kuboni (2013), was a capacity building exercise in the Graduate Programmes Department at The UWI Open

Campus, where part-time academics were retained to serve as course coordinators and e-tutors. It was realised that the provision of guidelines through manuals and handouts was insufficient, resulting in the use of monitoring tools to rate their activities. One challenge which impacted the implementation of this initiative was interdepartmental communication.

The potential effectiveness of online learning communities (OLCs) for teacher training was also posited by James (2009) who utilised blogging to teach an English Curriculum unit in a postgraduate teacher education programme at The UWI. Two notable outcomes were (1) the realisation that participants needed to be exposed to “how to analyse, reflect on, exchange, discuss, and thread ideas in an online learning community” (p. 86) prior to and during the initiative and (2) that topics of current local concern received the highest teacher interaction.

Ali (2021) described an academic writing programme at the St. Augustine campus that was staffed by some twenty part-time and nine full-time academics and was responsible for teaching 4000 students from five faculties annually. One of the early challenges of this programme was the recognition that training and development opportunities were problematic given the other commitments that part-time faculty had. In fact, extrinsic motivation to do anything other than prepare and deliver their classes was missing. Attempts to overcome these obstacles included the employment of part-time faculty who were willing to invest time in team building, professional and development exercises, and after-semester post mortem activities. The issuance of email addresses, payment for a weekly office hour and An Evening of Appreciation resulted in increased part-time faculty motivation and engagement.

Walcott and Rolle-Greenidge (2021, 2022a) proposed the creation of OLCs to support teachers using the cross-classroom collaborative project-based learning (C3PjBL) environment. Given that several faculty learning communities (FLCs) are project-based (Christie 2016), it was reasoned that the G2GCollaborate tool, which was built to support collaborative project-based learning across remote classrooms (C3PjBL), could be utilised to create OLCs. For successful interactions within an OLC it was recognised that group formation, communication among members (both synchronous and asynchronous) and the sharing of resources would be basic features of a tool that supports OFLCs. G2GCollaborate was therefore considered an appropriate tool for OFLCs given its project creation features, manual and automatic group formation mechanisms, synchronous and asynchronous communication through shared messages and wikis, and a shared resource library.

Online faculty learning communities

Although there is no standardised definition of OFLCs, they can be viewed as specialised FLCs that live primarily in a virtual space and are disciplinary (connecting faculty with similar interests) (Rundquist et al. 2015). FLCs are cross-disciplinary communities of six to fifteen members, who engage in yearlong, collaborative, activities, focused on the scholarship of teaching (Cox 2004). These FLCs may be cohort-based (which are focused on the cohort's needs), topic-based (which addresses a given issue then disbands) or unstructured (where topics are selected at meetings) (Sherer et al. 2003). OFLCs are examples of CoPs (Sherer et al. 2003).

OFLCs offer opportunities for critical reflection, knowledge construction, resource sharing and support for teaching and technical issues (Brooks 2010). Successful OFLCs comprise faculty with place and time constraints who are committed to a shared vision. These faculty offer mutual support and timely feedback through accessible and usable communication tools (Charalambos, Michalinos, and Chamberlain 2004). Given that faculty can meet anywhere at any time, OFLCs help to reduce travel time and cost (McKenna et al., 2016).

Summary

The lack of sustained faculty development opportunities for part-time staff at The UWI points to a gap in pedagogical and technology support for these faculty. Given the importance of faculty development for all, to ensure quality teaching, there is a need to introduce a new mechanism that can provide sustained faculty development for part-time faculty that is cost effective and accessible. One such mechanism is OFLCs. Importantly, Level 4 of Fink (2013) typology can be achieved through OFLCs.

Methodology

A critical review design (Grant and Booth 2009) was employed in this research to identify potential benefits, barriers, and technological toolset for the implementation of OFLCs. In a critical review the analyses and synthesis of multiple sources is presented. The following steps were employed in this study: (1) formulate the research questions, develop a search strategy, search the research literature,

and select appropriate items for review; (2) critically review the items; and (3) synthesise the results.

The formulated research questions (RQs) were:

RQ 1: What are the potential benefits of OFLCs for part-time faculty at the regional university?

RQ 2: What are the barriers to the implementation of OFLCs at the regional university?

RQ 3: What technology toolset could be used to implement the OFLCs at the regional university?

To answer the research questions ERIC, PsychAPA, Academic Search Premier and Google Scholar were searched using the terms “online faculty learning communities,” “faculty online learning communities,” “virtual faculty learning communities,” and “part-time staff” and “uwi.” Additionally, Google was searched using the keyword “part-time staff” and “uwi.” Content analysis (Columbia Public Health 2022) was used to identify data associated with the phrases “OFLC benefits”, “OFLC implementation barriers” and “OFLC technology toolset”. Manual coding was employed, and rigour was ensured through data triangulation using multiple sources, such as newspapers, published university documents and press releases, and research articles. Given the systematic nature of the search process (content analysis, critique, and synthesis) the validity of the search process was also assured.

Results

Research Question 1: *What are the potential benefits of OFLCs for part-time faculty at the regional university?*

The research literature highlights many benefits of OFLCs for faculty. Some of the important benefits include increased competence, the building of communities that offer a safe place to share resources, reflect, ask questions and receive feedback, and the offering of support.

OFLCs are well-suited to increase the competence of members through the sharing of ideas (Brooks 2010), the construction of new knowledge (Brooks 2010), advising on the way the university works (professional knowledge) (Dancy et al. 2019), and targeted learning through connections with peers of similar

interest (Dancy et al. 2019). The completion of scholarship of teaching and learning projects (Lau et al. 2017), individually or in groups (Corbo et al. 2016), also significantly enhances the pedagogy of faculty and helps to form strong, supportive communities.

According to Charalambos, Michalinos, and Chamberlain (2004), successful OLCs for professional development allow people who cannot meet in person due to place and time constraints to meet. They also provide mutual support and timely feedback. By meeting regularly, over time, faculty form a community where they can collaborate, exchange ideas, ask/answer questions, share resources, and reflect (Rundquist et al. 2015; Corbo et al. 2016; Lau et al. 2017; Dancy et al. 2019; Velez 2009; Reilly et al. 2012; Nelson et al. 2016; Niebuhr et al. 2014; Pimmel et al. 2013). Sherer, Shea, and Kristensen (2003) also posited that FLCs enhanced teaching knowledge through mutual growth and provided an opportunity to meet new colleagues, which helps faculty overcome geographic isolation (Charalambos, Michalinos, and Chamberlain 2004).

Brooks (2010) argued that at some time all faculty needed support from peers on campus, however, the time or opportunity to pursue these social connections face-to-face may not materialise. Despite this, many universities are still unable to provide effective training, development, and reward prospects. Further, Brooks (2010) contended that online support for technical and teaching issues, questions about employment materials, sharing ideas, and the generation of new understanding and knowledge would be attractive to faculty who required access outside of business hours or were unable to make social connections. Similarly, OFLCs effectively supported faculty in the use of research-based instructional strategies (Lau et al. 2021; Rundquist et al. 2015).

Research Question 2: *What are the barriers to the implementation of OFLCs at the regional university?*

Schieffer (2015) described several barriers to virtual collaboration, such as readiness, trust, and sustainability. Christie (2016) added that getting online participation was challenging and commitment levels were low. In addition, members were not willing to review work from their peers and would not ask for feedback.

De Jong (2012) reported that teachers felt isolated in teacher learning communities despite the existence of online chat. Rundquist et al. (2015) concurred, intimating that it was difficult to build a community without in-person interactions. Likewise, Schieffer (2015) noted that the geographical separation of members and

differences in their communication technologies limited good communication. Brooks (2010) supported this position by asserting that teachers were expected to employ ever-changing technology platforms. This has led to community members' frustrations and inadequacies in the use of new technologies due to the steep learning curves of some technologies according to Reilly et al. (2012).

Christie (2016) reported that existing workloads impacted OFLC members' ability to find time to engage in community activities and, given that members' schedules changed during the year (Rundquist et al. 2015), meeting schedule conflicts were experienced (Christie 2016).

At the regional university under study, part-time and adjunct faculty were also expected to quickly become familiar with technologies such as Moodle after only engaging with students using email (*Barbados Today* 2020).

Additionally, the learning curve was steeper, and interventions longer, for those faculty who were not considered technologically savvy. It was suggested that all faculty should complete the CUTL programme because it helped faculty to develop the skills needed for the online environment. This programme, however, was only mandatory for new, full-time faculty, and therefore part-time faculty might be ill-prepared for the online environment. Thurab-Nkhosi (2019) suggested that the St. Augustine campus had achieved Level 3 of Fink's typology, implying that there was almost universal faculty development with mandatory activities for new staff. This is potentially the case for the Mona and Cave Hill campuses as well, given the institution-wide implementation of the CUTL for new full-time faculty. Evidence does not suggest, however, that this is the case for part-time faculty.

Efforts have been made to build communities at the regional university, for example, Kuboni (2013) asserted that a community of inquiry model (comprising cognitive presence, social presence and teaching presence) was embraced by The Open Campus. Kuboni (2013) concluded that although early signs of a learning organisation were present, communication challenges and issues related to hiring part-time staff in a timely manner were experienced. Geofroy et al. (2017) also endeavoured to build a learning community comprising teachers and administrators in a Master's in Education course in Trinidad and Tobago. One of the biggest challenges experienced was the harmonising of time and deadlines of the community leaders. Also, community members had competing course demands which potentially impacted the quality of their unsupervised community activities.

Research Question 3: *What technology toolset could be used to implement the OFLCs at the regional university?*

Schieffer (2015) noted that choosing the necessary toolset for OFLC can be overwhelming due to the large variety of Internet tools available. Further, he posited that the complexity of the tools can make them unusable; and concluded that the toolset selected must be easy to use and accommodate a wide variety of users, since members might not have the time required and the desire to learn different tools. A variety of tools are required for OFLCs. These include tools for group formation and interaction, synchronous (including video conferencing) and asynchronous communication, sharing of resources, posting of comments and provision of feedback (Walcott and Rolle-Greenidge 2022a).

Sherer, Shea, and Kristensen (2003) proposed the use of an FLC Portal which utilised discussion boards (for questions and answers), standard website document handling capabilities (for shared resources), site search engines, and community management tools. Likewise, Corrales et al. (2020) utilised an online collaboration hub to post comments, links, and documents (and other resources), while using email for asynchronous communication. Niebuhr et al. (2014) utilised email and discussion boards in Blackboard (a learning management system) for asynchronous communication, while using Adobe Connect for synchronous communication. Similarly, Nelson et al. (2016) employed Adobe Connect for synchronous and asynchronous communication, while using Open Atrium for resource sharing.

Schieffer (2015) proposed the use of email, chat, whiteboards and file sharing for OFLCs. Alternatively, Reilly et al. (2012) advanced the use of Twitter (now X) for safe and anonymous discussions among faculty, along with tools such as Skype and Adobe Connect.

Walcott and Rolle-Greenidge (2022a) proposed the use of G2GCollaborate for the creation of OLCs. Central to G2GCollaborate is the shared wiki and resource library which allows project group members to ask and answer questions, provide feedback and share resources. Also, key to G2GCollaborate is its ability to create projects and manually or automatically assign group members (Rolle-Greenidge and Walcott 2021; Walcott and Rolle-Greenidge 2022b). Corbo et al. (2016) also described a custom tool called SocialCast, which is like Facebook, to facilitate asynchronous communication in FLCs. SocialCast allows the creation of private groups, posts and comments on posts; the liking of post and comments; as well as uploading of files and the linking to external resources.

The ability of part-time staff to transition quickly to the online mode and

utilise tools such as learning management systems was demonstrated at the onset of emergency remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic at the School of Education at the St. Augustine campus. Kalloo et al. (2020) noted that part-time (and full-time) teachers' familiarity with ICT tools allowed them to access Moodle successfully. This familiarity was supplemented by in-house professional development which led to a smooth transition to distance learning. There was, however, a short-lived period of dissonance and disequilibrium at the beginning.

Discussion

OFLCs increase the competencies of their members and offer support. The research literature provides promising evidence that these types of communities can be successfully formed at the regional university if the barriers are overcome. According to Geofroy et al. (2017), an important realisation was that a mindset shift is required since participants might be more comfortable with the traditional teacher-centred paradigm.

Additionally, training on the challenges and goals of building community should be provided. James (2009) also noted that training would need to be provided on how to be effective in an OLC. Moreover, Chisholm and Kennedy (2014) asserted that the Mona Campus believed that the time was right to establish learning communities.

Similarly, Kuboni (2013) argued that the use of monitoring tools to rate part-time faculty's activities allowed the successful implementation of a learning community at the Open Campus. Ali (2021) also demonstrated that by recognising part-time faculty's efforts at the St. Augustine Campus, their motivation and engagement increased. Finally, through collaborative efforts at the Cave Hill Campus, faculty (including part-time) were able to successfully reflect on their teaching practices while learning to use technology tools to build e-portfolios (Walcott and Grant 2006a, 2006b, 2010).

However, barriers to the creation of OFLCs – such as buy-in, attrition, scheduling conflicts, competing demands, communication, and competence in the use of technologies – do exist at the regional university, and therefore mechanisms must be put in place to successfully overcome them.

Buy-in and attrition can be addressed through shared control and ownership (Charalambos, Michalinos, and Chamberlain 2004). With members heavily vested in the OFLC, their engagement and motivation will potentially also increase (Ali 2021). The benefits of OFLCs, to members and leaders, would need to be

communicated upfront (Charalambos, Michalinos, and Chamberlain 2004). These will include support, timely feedback and resource sharing using usable communication tools (Brooks 2010; Charalambos, Michalinos, and Chamberlain 2004), opportunities for the scholarship of teaching (Cox 2004), recognition (Ali 2021) and modified duties or time release (Cox 2004).

Given the group size flexibility of OFLCs of between six to fifteen members (Cox 2004), scheduling conflicts can be minimised using smaller groups with compatible schedules. Furthermore, the online nature of OFLCs with its anytime, anywhere access, will help to minimise the impact caused by competing demands since time and money will not be wasted due to travel (McKenna et al. 2016). Training in the use of technology (for example, as demonstrated in Walcott and Grant (2006a, 2006b, 2010) and as provided by CETL) can provide members with the skills needed to participate in the OFLCs.

Several tools could be used to implement OFLCs including commercially available Moodle, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams. However, the advantages and limitations of these tools should be explored prior to adoption.

Table 1 compares these three tools and G2GCollaborate using six features (including communication and group formation). Although each tool provides synchronous and asynchronous communication, Moodle and G2GCollaborate do not provide web conferencing natively. A workaround means using an open-source video conference tool such as BigBlueButton (<https://support.moodle.com/>

Table 1. A Comparison of the Software Tool that Can be Used to Implement OFLC at the Regional University

Feature /Tools	G2G Collaborate	Moodle	Zoom	Microsoft Teams
Asynchronous Communication	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Synchronous Communication	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Web Conferencing	No	No	Yes	Yes
Group Formation	Manual/ Automatic	Manual/ Automatic (alphabetically by name)	Manual/ Automatic (random)	Manual
Resource Sharing/Library	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Client Software Installation Required	No	No	Yes	Yes

support/solutions/articles/80000832046-bigbluebutton-video-conferencing-on-moodlecloud); this has already been integrated into MoodleCloud (<https://moodle.com/solutions/moodlecloud/>), a hosted version of Moodle. Other considerations include resource sharing, which is not natively provided by Zoom; and, client software installations, which are required by Zoom and Microsoft Teams. Another important factor is group formation. Most of these tools either require manual group formation or provide limited automatic group formation (alphabetically by name or random). Only G2GCollaborate provides automatic group formation by technological skills and/or cognitive ability.

An important consideration that was intentionally omitted from Table 1 is cost. At the time of writing, these are the costs. Moodle is a free open-source platform (<https://moodle.com/about/>); however if external management is required, the starter plan for MoodleCloud – which costs USD\$110 (tax exclusive) for 50 users with 250MB of storage (<https://moodle.com/solutions/moodlecloud/>) – could be used. Zoom (<https://zoom.us/pricing>) offers tier-based pricing which includes a free tier with up to 100 participants per meeting, for 40 minutes; however, it does not offer cloud storage or file sharing. The Pro tier, however, allows 30-hour meetings with a maximum of 100 participants at a cost of USD\$149.90 per year, per user (tax inclusive). Similarly, Microsoft Teams (<https://www.microsoft.com/en-ww/microsoft-teams/compare-microsoft-teams-options?activetab=pivot%3Aprimaryr1&rtc=1&market=bb>) offers a free tier for a maximum of 100 participants for one hour meetings. In this tier, users have up to 5GB of cloud storage and can share files. The next available tier, Microsoft Teams Essential, costs USD\$48 per year, per user (tax exclusive) for up to 300 participants who can have meetings up to 30 hours long. It also provides up to 10GB of cloud storage per user. Although the Microsoft Teams plans appear more competitive, there is a cap of 500,000 users (overall) for the free plan (<https://www.trustradius.com/products/microsoft-teams/pricing>).

The selection of the technology toolset for OFLCs at the regional university, given the financial constraints, should begin with an examination of the tools that are already available. These tools are G2GCollaborate (recently created by researchers at the university), Zoom, Moodle and Microsoft Teams. Each OFLC should make the choice that best suits their needs. For example, Zoom and Moodle might be considered desirable given their use in online learning at the institution (*Barbados Today* 2020). Part-time faculty's familiarity with ICT tools, coupled with the necessary training should allow a quick onboarding process (Kalloo et al. 2020).

Limitations

Given that this is a relatively new research topic for the Caribbean, limited research related to the formation of communities at the regional university was available; however, enough research literature existed to provide a convincing treatment of the potential of adopting OFLCs.

Conclusion

This paper explored the creation of OFLCs to address the developmental needs of part-time faculty at a multi-campus, regional university. Using a critical review design the potential benefits, barriers, and technology toolset needed for OFLCs were determined. The potential benefits of OFLCs were the creation of supportive communities that help to increase members' competencies. Barriers included buy-in, attrition, scheduling conflicts, and competence in the use of technologies. It was determined that pre-existing toolsets at the regional university, comprising Zoom, Moodle, Microsoft Teams, and G2GCollaborate, could effectively support OFLCs. Finally, recommendations are presented which will foster the creation of sustainable OFLCs for part-time faculty.

Recommendations

The following recommendations serve as a call-to-action for the creation and fostering of OFLCs at the regional institution. These recommendations highlight the importance of connecting and supporting the part-time faculty of the institution in a cost and time effective manner and are intended to promote widespread adoption.

1. Create OFLCs for part-time faculty across the campuses of the regional university. These learning communities will serve as a mechanism for faculty development, as well as providing a venue for addressing technical and teaching issues, questions about employment materials and the creation of new knowledge (Brooks 2010). This is an excellent opportunity to build on the research efforts of Kuboni (2013), James (2009), Ali (2021), and Walcott and Rolle-Greenidge (2022a) who all proposed the use of learning communities for faculty development. These learning communities should be disci-

pline-based (for example, all part-time Chemistry faculty across the regional university), between six and fifteen members (Cox 2004), led by experienced teaching and learning full-time faculty from the discipline as identified by Deans and/or CETL (Thurab-Nkhosi 2018), of nine-month duration (given the contract length of part-time faculty (Lindo 2022)), and, unstructured or topic-based in order to address the specific needs of each OFLCs (Sherer et al. 2003). Furthermore, part of the duration of the OFLC should be dedicated to a scholarship of teaching and learning project to be implemented in the part-time faculty's classrooms (Lau et al. 2017).

2. Create one or more OFLCs for the full-time faculty that are leading the part-time faculty OFLCs. The size and number of these OFLCs will be dependent on the total number of departments/disciplines participating in the initiative. Unlike typical OFLCs, these will be cross-disciplinary with the goal of recruiting part-time faculty OFLC members and full-time faculty OFLC leaders, establishing part-time OFLCs, and researching and communicating the activities and outcomes of the part-time faculty OFLCs. The research generated should lead to reputable research publications which will help to boost the profile of the regional university (*UWI News* 2022).
3. The technology toolset used by the OFLCs should be restricted in the first instance (unless there is a mitigating reason not to) to those toolsets that are readily available at the regional university and for which support is already provided by the CETL. These tools include G2GCollaborate, Zoom, Moodle and Microsoft Teams (<https://www.cavehill.uwi.edu/cetl/educational-technology.aspx>) (<https://sta.uwi.edu/cetl/>) (<https://www.mona.uwi.edu/cetl/>). This ensures a rapid onboarding process given the removal of a potential technology barrier for part-time staff. Importantly, OFLC leaders should determine which toolset to use based on the membership of the OFLC. For example, if, in the first instance, an OFLC has many part-time faculty from the Cave Hill Campus, then a suitable platform might be Moodle/Zoom given that over 1000 staff were transitioned to Moodle in 2020 to facilitate emergency teaching and learning (*Barbados Today* 2020).
4. Part-time faculty OFLC members and full-time faculty OFLC leaders should be given incentives and/or compensation for participation in the OFLCs. Given that Charalambos, Michalinos, and Chamberlain (2004) posited that incentives and compensation should be clearly stated up front, participating full-time faculty need to be able to negotiate with their deans or heads of

department suitable compensation, such as time release, or modified duties; for example, release for one credit hour a week to run a two-hour OFLC discussion each week (Cox 2004). Similarly, an incentive for part-time faculty participation is the time they will save by having their questions answered and the teaching and learning support that they will receive. Also, a more tangible benefit could be a certificate of participation at the end of the OFLC which would show that the part-time faculty member engaged in faculty development activities.

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