

## Advice for New Adjunct Faculty

*Colleagues from two NC community colleges share their suggestions for new adjunct faculty members as the new semester begins*



*Dr. Camille Reese, a former nursing educator, is Vice President of Instruction at Mitchell Community College in Statesville.*

**If you could give a new adjunct faculty member one piece of advice, what would it be?** To be successful, it will be important for you to connect with college personnel who can help you in a variety of ways. Full-time faculty and staff are kept in the loop about any new college policies and procedures as well as current initiatives and projects. They can help you stay engaged so you can stay informed and up-to-date. Don't be afraid to ask questions or seek out information that will help you so you can focus on your primary task—preparing for and teaching your assigned courses so that together, we can help our students succeed. Deans and program coordinators will be able to direct you to additional college resources which will be helpful to you. Bottom line: stay engaged and ask questions.

**How would you suggest preparing for my very first class?** As soon as you know you will be teaching a course, start gathering any resources you may need, including the textbook and related supplies. By doing this, you can start to prepare lesson plans. If you will be required to use technology, make sure you know how to operate any equipment and that you have been given the access you need to digital materials. Prepare more material than you think you will need for the first class since you will need to assess the group and determine where to start.

Have at least one activity to break the ice and get the students interacting with you and the others in the class. It might be helpful to ask students to complete a benchmarking activity like a pretest or “quiz show” to help get a better understanding of the knowledge level of the group. Again, don't be afraid to ask questions of others who have previously taught the same course. They will more than likely be happy to share activities with you.

**Would you suggest seeking out a mentor, and if so, why?** ABSOLUTELY, seek out a mentor who can provide you guidance and feedback on your role as adjunct faculty. Ideally, you will have access to someone at your college but if not, find a seasoned educator who can give you some pointers on what you can bring to the classroom to help you be successful in your role. Many adjunct faculty are experts in their field but are novices in the classroom. The most successful adjunct faculty are those who can combine the best of their lived experiences in the “real world of work” with engaging classroom activities to get students actively involved. This helps create a porous boundary between what happens in the classroom and what is expected in the reality of work (contextual teaching and learning).

**What's the best way to engage students in class discussion?** It's important to let students know early on what your expectation is for them in terms of participation in discussions and other class activities. Students should be provided with a syllabus that includes these expectations. They should also be provided with a list of readings. The instructor needs to help students understand that their job is to help them master concepts. For that to happen, students need to be actively engaged in the learning process. That means students should read and prepare for class prior to the class meeting. Faculty should

prepare class activities that engage students in active learning practices through case studies, scenarios, and other real-world situations. The concept of the “flipped classroom” is popular in today’s learning environment. With the flipped classroom model, a student completes instructional activities prior to class so they can do more collaborative learning activities, under the guidance of the instructor, during class. Learning more about the concept of [flipped classrooms](#) may be helpful to you as you begin to engage in the learning process with students.

**I’m an expert in my profession and have conducted trainings at work, but I’ve never taught college students. What will surprise me and how should I prepare for it?** Each group of learners is very different. Just because a discussion topic or learning activity worked well with one group of learners does not necessarily mean it will work well with another. The instructor always needs to be over prepared for each class meeting. You need to learn how to be flexible so you can change your presentation, activity, or assessment based on the class. Just because you will generally be working with adults, doesn’t necessarily mean each student will be highly motivated to succeed. Many learners expect the instructor to “do the work” of teaching so they can absorb the information. It is the responsibility of the instructor to help students, regardless of age, understand that their learning will be at a much higher level if they are actively engaged in the learning process.



*Cyndi Johnson spent 38 years in various roles in the manufacturing industry. She is a Mechanical Engineering Technology Instructor at Forsyth Technical Community College in Winston-Salem.*

**If you could give a new adjunct faculty member one piece of advice, what would it be?**

I have two. One: You only need to be one class ahead of the students. I know this sounds like you don’t have to plan, but it’s really a way of

managing the lesson and lecture, handouts, answers to assignment questions, and any other items you need for one class. It can become overwhelming. So, get as much done ahead of time as possible. But remember, you only need to be one class ahead. Two: You know more than your students do. It may take you a bit of time to figure out the best way to get lessons across, but you will. You will also make mistakes. Admit it was a mistake and move on.

**How would you suggest preparing for my very first class?** Make sure you understand the deliverables, objectives, and outcomes of the class. If you are lucky, a previous instructor has prepared lectures, notes, tests, etc. Ask your Supervisor for any of these materials, and if they don’t have any, use the outcomes, textbook(s), and your industry experience to guide you through the lessons. On the first day, I always have my students fill out a short questionnaire like the one below. It will help you learn and connect with students and gain some insight into their experiences.

- Do you work? If so, where, and how many hours per week?
- Three things you consider your strengths.
- Three things you want to work on.

Be very clear about your expectations and have them outlined in the syllabus. I even go over how partial credit is awarded, because it will come up. Ice breakers are a great way to start off Day One. I use a lot of icebreakers from my time in industry; you can find lots of icebreaker ideas for college students online.

**Would you suggest seeking out a mentor, and if so, why?** I have taught at two community colleges. At my first college, my department chair was my mentor, and at the second, I was enrolled in a year-long class for faculty and staff new to the college. Both mentor “scenarios” gave me advice and insights into how the college worked. I would advise having a colleague or a group that can help you acclimate to working at a community college. It is NOTHING like working

in industry. At first, I was frustrated at the slow pace of how things get accomplished. Having a mentor will help you work through transitioning from a fast-paced industry job to teaching.

**What’s the best way to engage students in class discussion?**

Hands on! This can be literally hands-on activities or open discussion. You should be able to relate the topic to an experience you’ve had during your career. Students really enjoy hearing about things that happen in the workplace. Another way to keep them engaged is to not let them have their cell phones out. Period.

**I’m an expert in my profession and have conducted trainings at work, but I’ve never taught college students. What will surprise me and how should I prepare for it?**

One thing that surprised me was how few students had a solid and honest work ethic. In my professional experience of 38 years, I have fired people for less than what I have had students display. But we don’t fire students. Not all students are trying to find a way out of the work, but those that are will require more coaching and attention. I have used “Participation” as a percentage of the course grade; this is where that behavior can be reflected. Some students have outside

circumstances that are negatively impacting them in the classroom. Know the resources available to support them (ask your Mentor). In my experience, most students straight out of high school require more attention than adult students. Be prepared to hold them to the expectations you set forth in your syllabus, and for them to take issue with being held accountable. My experiences with adult and veteran students have been very positive. They want to be in the classroom, they want to learn, and they do the work. Be prepared for them to “check” disruptive students. Lastly, be prepared to get questions for which you do not have an answer. I make a point of saying, “Wow, great question! I don’t know but will have an answer next time we meet.” At our next class meeting, the answer to the question is the first thing I review. It is okay to not have every answer!

***Editor’s Note:** The perspectives presented in this issue of NC-NET News are solely the opinions of the authors and do not represent the position of any institution.*

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**For more resources, check out NC-NET’s Adjunct Faculty [Toolkit](#) and the NC-NET Academy [course offerings](#) for 2019-2020.**

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