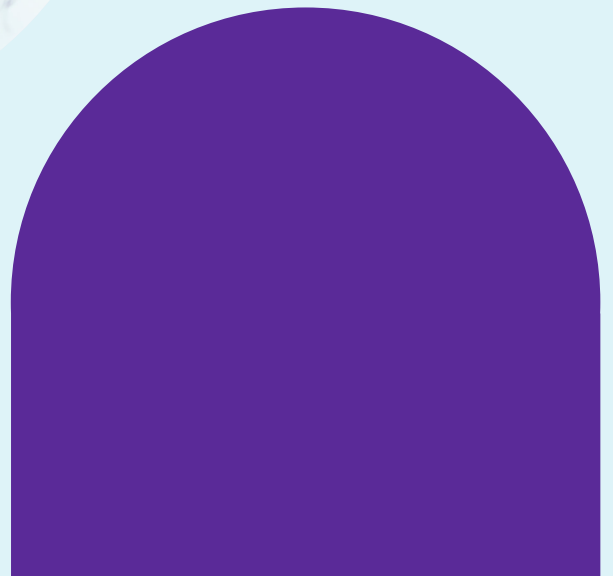
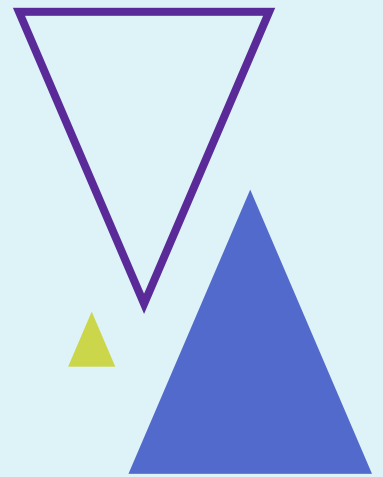


How to improve faculty experience, happiness, and retention



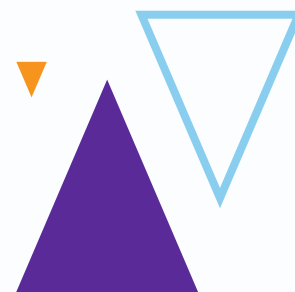
Across higher education, there are countless reports of faculty feeling overwhelmed, disengaged, and burnt out. According to Inside Higher Ed and Hanover Research, 35 percent of provosts have [seen higher-than-usual faculty turnover rates](#) – a concerning trend considering faculty experience directly influences student success and institutional stability. **What could be contributing to this wave of faculty dissatisfaction?**


“That’s [...] the root cause: Faculty don’t feel they’re involved in the decision-making process. They don’t think their input is valued.”

–Omid Fotuhi, *Director of Learning Innovation at WGU Labs*

Faculty are overwhelmed by systemic issues like lack of support, unclear expectations, and inadequate resources. They are expected to teach, research, attract funding, and support students – but there are only so many hours in the day. To make matters worse, as colleges and universities look to solve these challenges, many are neglecting to include faculty in the problem-solving process. This can lead to a slew of new policies and technology purchases, all without getting faculty’s feedback or understanding how the changes will affect instruction.

According to reporting by [Inside Higher Ed](#), 87 percent of faculty members said their administrative team makes decisions on edtech implementation, while fewer than 20 percent said that their institutions asked for their feedback annually. Reflecting on these stats, Omid Fotuhi, the Director of Learning Innovation at WGU Labs said, “That’s[...]the root cause: Faculty don’t feel they’re involved in the decision-making process. They don’t think their input is valued.”



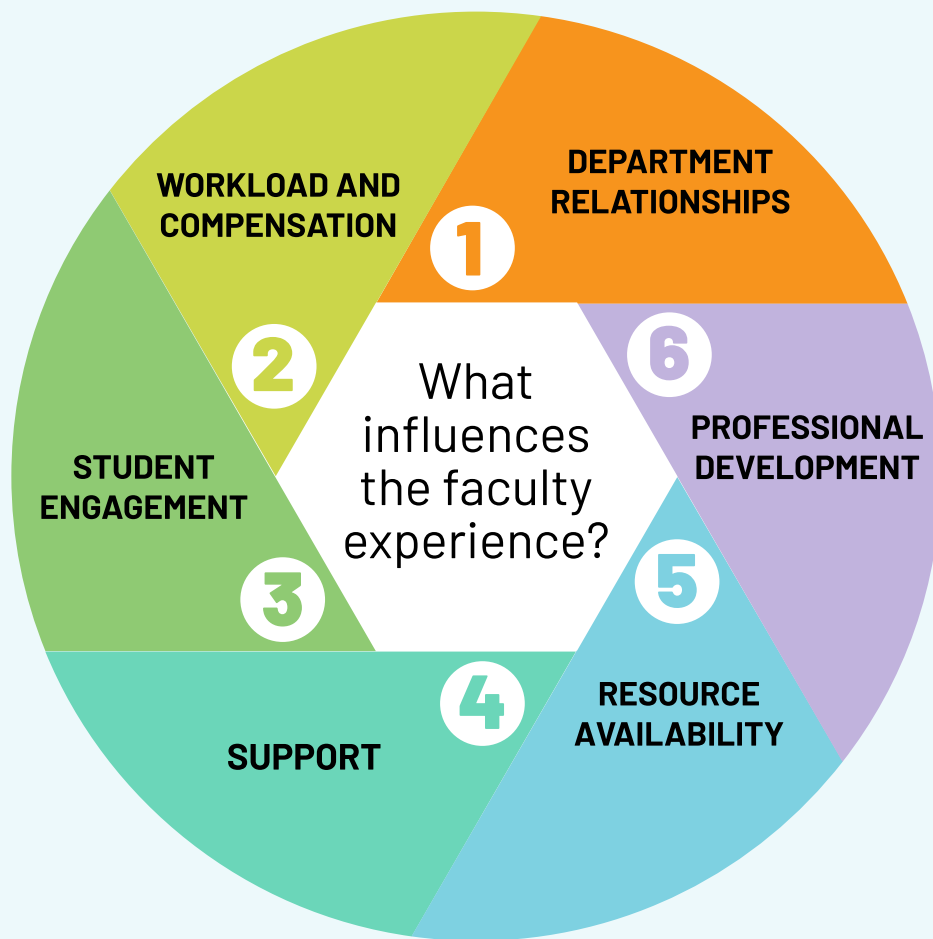


In addition to feeling unheard, many faculty members find that much of their time is spent on bureaucratic processes like budget reporting, compliance paperwork, and assessment and accreditation reporting, rather than instruction. Structural and bureaucratic challenges are separating faculty from their true vocation: shaping minds and making an impact.

Institutions can begin to address these concerns by actively involving faculty in decision-making processes and adjusting their workloads to focus more on impact and less on tedious tasks. Prioritizing faculty engagement is not just a personnel retention strategy; it is a comprehensive approach that [promotes a healthier academic environment](#). **Read on to explore 10 faculty retention strategies to engage your instructors and improve morale on your campus.**



Structural
and bureaucratic
challenges are
separating faculty from
their true vocation:
**shaping minds and
making an impact.**



1 Department relationships
How [faculty members work together](#) (and whether they enjoy doing so) directly affects the faculty experience.

2 Workload and compensation
Faculty experience may also be impacted by how well the workload matches their compensation and whether they can cope with those workloads.

3 Student engagement
Many faculty are facing an unprecedented wave of student apathy, which can make faculty feel less engaged in their own work. Professor David D. Perlmutter says that as administrators, it is important to [acknowledge faculty's discontent](#) and find ways to support them while boosting student engagement.

4 Support
Higher education leaders and administrators must also consider if faculty members have adequate administrative support to do their jobs effectively. Sarah Rose Cavanagh, a Senior Associate Director for Teaching and Learning, states that since instructors know their students and the higher education classroom from years of teaching, it is important for [institutions to trust faculty's intuition](#) and autonomy.

5 Resource availability
Faculty members need the right course materials and resources to deliver excellent teaching and effectively connect with students, which simultaneously enriches their teaching experiences.

6 Professional development
Workshops, mentorship opportunities, and training courses are beneficial resources that help staff grow professionally.

Importance of faculty happiness and engagement

Faculty happiness and engagement directly influence their experience. Here's how faculty job satisfaction impacts the institution, staff, and students:

Improved faculty commitment and participation

Enthusiastic and satisfied faculty members are more passionate and willing to participate in classroom activities and professional development.

Increased progress toward institutional goals

When higher ed leaders and administrators show appreciation for the hard work of faculty members, it contributes to faculty happiness and motivates them to work toward institutional goals. According to Sarah Rose Cavanagh, the industry needs to **“reframe faculty development around a deep culture of respect for instructor autonomy and choice.”** This requires trusting and respecting faculty members to make the changes they see fit to boost institutional improvement and enhance student performance.

Enhanced student academic performance:

Faculty's engagement and enthusiasm are contagious. When instructors are excited to teach and share the intricacies of their subject, it encourages increased participation from students as well.

Improved life satisfaction

When faculty are more satisfied with their day-to-day responsibilities, they are more likely to have a positive outlook on life and enjoy their work.

Better faculty retention rates

A healthy work environment reduces stress and improves their happiness.

Improved student experience

Faculty members with a better attitude and mindset may be more attentive to student needs and expectations, helping them create positive interactions and improve student satisfaction and retention.





10 faculty retention strategies to boost faculty happiness and engagement

1

Minimize faculty workload

Finding ways to optimize faculty job responsibilities outside of teaching students, such as grading papers and reporting on assessment, can reduce the chances of burnout and allow faculty members to remain engaged while teaching and performing other tasks. Faculty compensation should match their work hours and workload. Consider incorporating incentives, like providing additional compensation for each professional development program completed.

2

Provide professional development opportunities

Administrators may improve faculty happiness by encouraging mentorship and peer-support programs. This is a great way to encourage collaboration, feedback, and a support system that allows employees to grow professionally.

It's also important to make professional development, workshops, and other training relevant to faculty needs by giving them a choice about the training programs they pursue. Networking opportunities can also be valuable to faculty members looking to grow and advance in their careers, helping improve retention. Faculty developer JT Torres says that opportunities like teaching centers encourage social connection and empowerment.

3

Create a more inclusive work culture

Build a community where students and faculty members feel welcomed and respected. An inclusive culture improves faculty's mindset, motivation, and attitude, helping them maintain their passion for teaching.

A positive work environment also contributes to faculty experience. This involves incorporating workplace training and providing secure channels for voicing concerns. Holding workshops that teach faculty how to collaborate and work alongside peers with varying backgrounds establishes a culture of respect. Creating feedback channels like a faculty representative, anonymous feedback form, or regular one-on-one meetings can also help faculty feel heard and valued.

Show appreciation for everyone's effort

Administrators may be able to show appreciation for everyone's hard work when they consider the time and effort that go into their job responsibilities. Some ways to show appreciation include:

- Giving rewards for particular types of achievements.
- Handing out prizes at company celebrations.
- Creating peer recognition programs.
- Giving shout-outs to hardworking employees during team meetings.

Give your staff a voice

Faculty members feel heard when administrators address each staff member's concerns or let them have a say in important decisions for the institution. This encourages them to be more attentive and productive. Additionally, if administrators give faculty members freedom and self-governance over how they teach and meet student learning needs, they may feel more trusted and happy to teach.



6

Encourage breaks

Breaks help preserve energy, keep workers refreshed, and prevent burnout and unhappiness. Encourage staff members to take lunch breaks away from their desks, go for a walk, have conversations with colleagues, get a snack or drink, or spend time outside the office to maintain productivity and faculty happiness.

7

Provide valuable resources

Ask faculty members what resources might assist them in connecting with students effectively. Consider online asynchronous professional development, where they can access course material and resources at any time to improve student outcomes. Doing so may also motivate them to engage students better.

8

Be transparent about expectations

From the first day of a faculty member's new job, inform them of expectations regarding training, projects, events, deadlines, and behavior so that they clearly understand their responsibilities. This ensures faculty know what to expect before they begin working so you can filter out candidates that are misaligned with the institution's culture and goals.

9

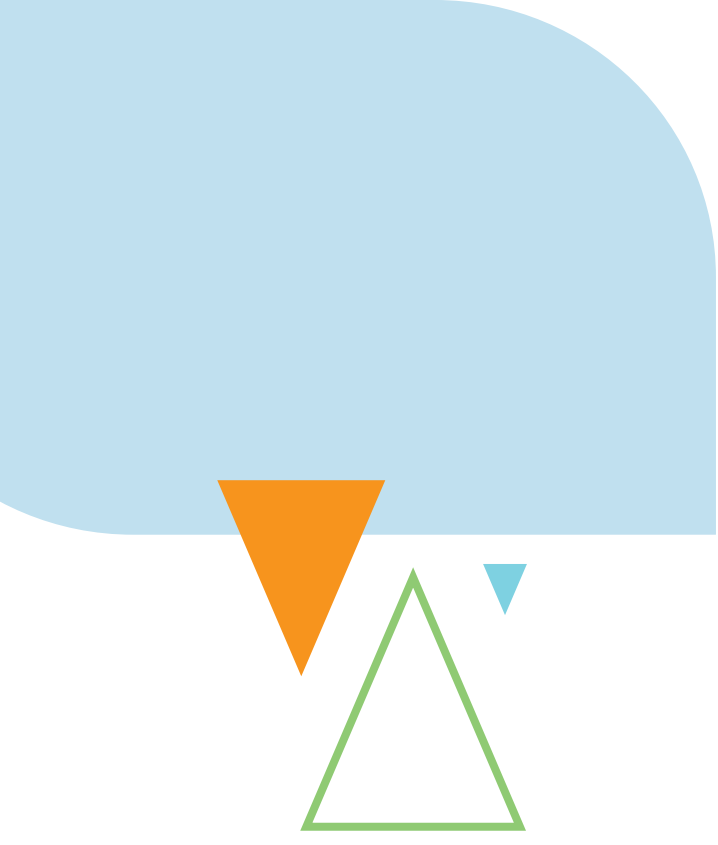
Support innovation

Supporting innovation from faculty members can reassure them that they are heard and respected, helping them grow professionally and increasing their happiness and engagement at work. Create a system that allows faculty members to pitch new ideas. This process should involve a follow-through and feedback loop to inform employees why their ideas were accepted or rejected. Once ideas are approved and implemented, it's important to give credit to the person who proposed the idea so that they know the institution values them.

10

Regularly evaluate faculty happiness and retention

Faculty happiness and retention require frequent monitoring to evaluate which strategies work and which need adjustments and improvements to achieve steady positive results. Specialized faculty success software may allow you to measure and track the success of faculty retention strategies implemented. These solutions store faculty activity data and provide insights into supporting faculty career growth.

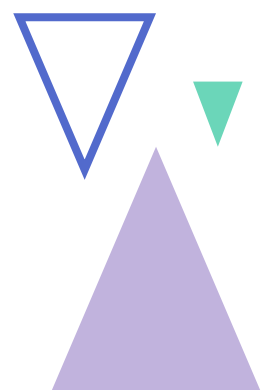


An inclusive culture **improves faculty's mindset, motivation, and attitude**, helping them maintain their passion for teaching.

Create a more inclusive work culture

Build a community where students and faculty members feel welcomed and respected. An inclusive culture improves faculty's mindset, motivation, and attitude, helping them maintain their passion for teaching.

A positive work environment also contributes to faculty experience. This involves incorporating workplace training and providing secure channels for voicing concerns. Holding workshops that teach faculty how to collaborate and work alongside peers with varying backgrounds establishes a culture of respect. Creating feedback channels like a faculty representative, anonymous feedback form, or regular one-on-one meetings can also help faculty feel heard and valued.





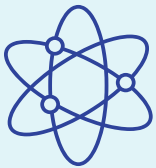
6 implementation challenges associated with faculty retention strategies

Faculty retention strategies come with challenges worth considering. Here are six implementation challenges – and game-changing solutions to minimize them effectively.



Budget and resource limitations

Institutions may face financial constraints that limit their ability to create comprehensive retention strategies and hire the necessary staff for them. It helps to create a long-term goal for attaining the money and resources needed to overcome budget limitations. In the meantime, institutions can implement solutions that do not require much funds, such as building a positive work environment, being transparent, and allowing teaching autonomy.



Resistance to change

Some faculty or administration members may be resistant to cultural changes reflected in new policies and practices. Some may also have concerns that it will disrupt existing workflows and relationships. Try to earn the trust of faculty members through a meeting where you ask about their concerns and address how the institution will work to minimize those challenges.



Diverse faculty needs

A faculty member's background, personal circumstances, roles, and disciplines may directly influence their specific expectations and needs. This means an institution may be unable to implement a strategy that is beneficial for all faculty members. You may combat this challenge by creating an ongoing initiative to listen to and record everyone's concerns and needs and working together to brainstorm solutions.



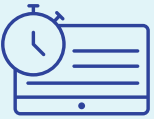
Administrative overload

New initiatives might warrant more complex administrative processes that slow the implementation process and delay effective retention strategies. This may be especially true when administrators juggle numerous priorities. Try incorporating software solutions that can streamline certain administrative processes.



Measurement and evaluation challenges

Difficulty with accurately defining success metrics may make it challenging to assess the effectiveness of retention strategies. Getting trustworthy measurement and evaluation software specifically for faculty happiness, retention, or engagement can help you gather and understand reliable data.



Monitoring implementation progress

Continuously monitoring faculty engagement levels post-implementation may be a challenging process when performed manually. Using automation and other technology solutions to track effectiveness over time simplifies the process. You could also establish a feedback loop for ongoing improvement of retention strategies to receive specific feedback from faculty and administration.





Improving faculty experience and happiness one step at a time

Faculty are the backbone of higher education, and higher ed leaders like you must foster a campus where faculty feel valued, respected, and heard. Of course, as Omid Fotuhi acknowledges in Inside Higher Ed's article about faculty burnout, this is easier said than done. "Most administrators, they're just fighting to stay afloat; it's a really difficult time for higher education," he said. "Administrators are making decisions on the limited information they have; that affects faculty [...] job satisfaction, which impacts students. It's a systems issue, so we're trying to connect the dots."



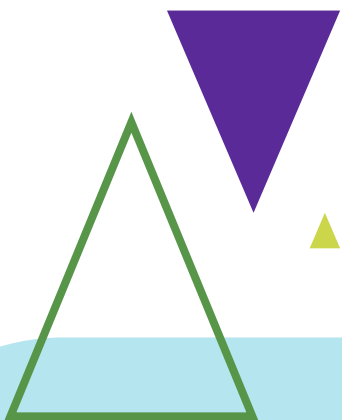
Though connecting these dots to improve faculty experience can feel like a tall order, a little bit of effort can go a long way. By involving faculty in decisions about edtech and student engagement, opening avenues to listen to faculty and receive feedback, and finding ways to give faculty time back in their day to focus more on instruction, you can start making improvements. Don't wait – help your faculty reignite their passion for teaching by providing them with the support they need today.

Track faculty happiness and retention

A positive faculty experience helps institutions grow, but this data can be complex and difficult to track over time. Using software that stores faculty data in one location can help improve your processes. Watermark has 20 years of experience and knowledge in data collection, measurement, and analysis software. [Watermark Faculty Success](#) helps gather deep insights into faculty data to encourage career development and assist with processes like review, promotion, and tenure. To learn more, [request a demo](#) today.

Linked Sources:

1. <https://www.watermarkinsights.com/resources/blog/harnessing-data-analytics-to-enhance-faculty-performance-and-development>
2. <https://www.interfolio.com/resources/blog/2024-survey-of-chief-academic-officers-by-inside-higher-ed/>
3. https://download.hlcommission.org/HLCTrends_INF.pdf
4. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-disposable-indispensable-faculty-member>
5. <https://www.watermarkinsights.com/resources/blog/empowering-faculty-collaboration-engagement>
6. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/admin-101-how-to-help-professors-in-their-worst-semester-ever>
7. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/after-a-tough-year-for-classroom-innovation-its-time-for-a-reset>
8. <https://www.watermarkinsights.com/resources/blog/tips-improving-student-satisfaction-in-higher-education>
9. <https://www.watermarkinsights.com/resources/blog/the-evolution-of-faculty-workload-management-trends-and-technologies>
10. <https://www.chronicle.com/newsletter/teaching/2024-07-25>
11. <https://www.watermarkinsights.com/solutions/faculty-success/>
12. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/admin-101-how-to-help-professors-in-their-worst-semester-ever>
13. <https://www.watermarkinsights.com/resources/blog/higher-education-technology-management>
14. <https://www.watermarkinsights.com/request-demo/>





watermark™

Watermark gives higher education institutions the tools they need to easily track, manage, and examine their data. For over twenty years, colleges and universities have used Watermark solutions to complete assessment and accreditation requirements, capture and analyze student feedback, showcase faculty accomplishments, and improve student engagement. Watermark's Educational Impact Suite (EIS) puts data into context so faculty and staff can focus on what matters most: institutional and student success.

Learn why Watermark is trusted by over 1,700 colleges and universities to support continuous improvement at www.watermarkinsights.com.