How to drive continuous faculty development

watermark™

Faculty development is critical to upholding the quality and consistency of your institution's academic offerings — but there are so many methods for pursuing it that knowing where to start can be tough. In this eBook, we will guide you through the four main tenets of ongoing faculty development:

1. Creating tailored professional development plans

2. Promoting active learning strategies

3. Emphasizing inclusive teaching practices

4. Establishing a culture of evaluation and continuous improvement

Though this comprehensive eBook has plenty of valuable information you can put into practice, we also understand that your role is demanding and you may not have time to read through each section thoroughly. For optimal learning, we've organized the content into two parts: a "Bird's-eye view" section that offers high-level takeaways and a "Deep-dive" section that allows you to explore the depths of each tenet of faculty development.

Of course, we recommend that you read the whole thing. Consider keeping a pen and pad of paper nearby to take notes, and keep this eBook close by the next time you are creating new faculty development plans to spark inspiration!
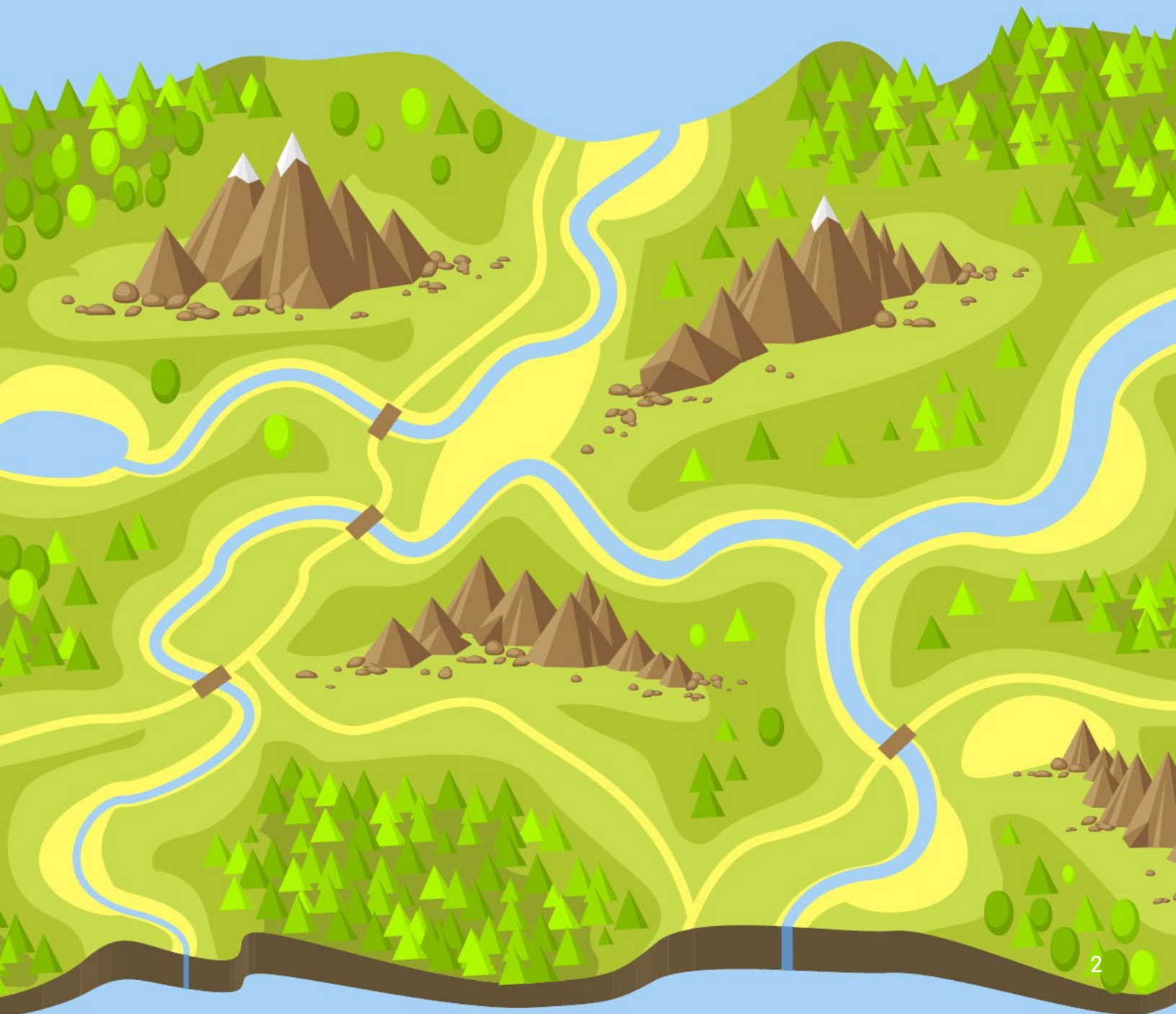
How can you drive continuous faculty development?

1. Tailor professional development plans

► **Individualized assessment**
Use self-assessment, peer evaluations, and student feedback to holistically monitor performance and personalize your mentorship.

► **Customized training programs**
Training generally falls under one of the following categories: technology training, people training, or specialty training. Once you've identified where your faculty member needs the most guidance, find relevant resources, conferences, or classes that can help them grow in those areas.

► **Long-term support**
Continuous improvement is the name of the game. It is not enough to give your faculty yearly reviews and development plans. Instead, provide them with long-term support like mentorship programs, coaching, and communities of practice.

Deep dive to learn more »

2. Promote active learning strategies

▶ **Hands-on workshops**

Faculty development should prioritize hands-on workshops that allow educators to experience active learning strategies directly. Flipped classrooms, problem-based learning, and collaborative projects all provide opportunities for faculty to engage in active learning.

Deep dive to learn more »

3. Emphasize inclusive teaching practices

▶ **Culturally responsive teaching**

Train your educators to understand the cultural contexts of students, incorporate diverse perspectives into the curriculum, and create an inclusive and welcoming learning environment.

▶ **Universal design for learning (UDL)**

The goal of UDL is to use a variety of teaching methods to remove any barriers to learning. It's about building in flexibility that can be adjusted for each student's strengths and needs. The three UDL principles are **engagement**, **representation**, and **action and expression**.

▶ **Accessibility**

Reinforce to your faculty that digital resources must be accessible to all students. Training for creating accessible documents, videos, and online content is essential. Providing free or low-cost alternatives is another layer to accessibility that ensures all students can participate in your instruction.

Deep dive to learn more »

4. Establish a culture of evaluation and continuous improvement

▶ **Data-informed decision-making**
Collecting and analyzing data on the effectiveness of teaching strategies, student outcomes, and faculty performance is essential for ongoing faculty development and improvement. This data can easily identify where an instructor is thriving and where they may need more support.

▶ **Recognition and rewards**
No win is too small to celebrate! Encourage continued participation in development programs by recognizing and rewarding faculty who have shown improvement.

Deep dive to learn more »

Interested in learning more about how you can support continuous faculty development?

See what Watermark can do for you.

How can you drive continuous faculty development?

1. Tailor professional development plans

Individualized assessment

One size does not fit all when it comes to faculty development. Each educator brings unique strengths, weaknesses, and teaching styles to the table. Therefore, it is essential to conduct individualized assessments to identify areas of improvement and professional growth opportunities.

▶ **Self-assessment:** Understand the educator's goals, strengths, and weaknesses by getting them to conduct a self-assessment. Get insight on the why behind certain challenges or behaviors. Understand the context of peer or student feedback you receive for this faculty member.

> It is essential to conduct individualized assessments to identify areas of improvement and professional growth opportunities.

▶ **Peer evaluations:** Have other faculty members conduct evaluations of their fellow educators. This insight can help you understand the educator's teaching effectiveness and understand how cooperative and collaborative a faculty member is with the rest of the staff. Community is an important value for many colleges and universities, and if a faculty member does not enjoy collaborating or does not communicate effectively with their peers, it can be a sign that this faculty member needs more support.

▶ **Student feedback:** Your faculty member might be an amazing academic with an impressive body of research, but it is also important to understand how they function in their main role — as an educator. Students provide invaluable data about how this faculty member delivers as an instructor.

Individualized assessment gives you a holistic view of faculty performance so you can tailor your mentorship and offer guidance where it will be most helpful.

Customized training programs

Based on the results of the assessments, institutions should design personalized faculty development plans. This could include targeted training sessions, workshops, and resources that address specific areas of needed growth. It is also important to discuss these plans with your faculty member so they can align them with their own teaching goals.

► **Technology training:** Though years have passed since the onset of the pandemic, much of the technology introduced during that time is here to stay. With all of the challenges higher ed has faced since 2020, perhaps your faculty has not had the time to fully adopt these tools and use them to the best of their ability. Find helpful webinars or set up time with reps from the software company that supports your digital platforms to hold training sessions for your faculty. Consider also setting up a peer group to host weekly technology office hours to collaborate and level up their skills.

► **People training:** Is your faculty member struggling to relate to students or collaborate with peers? Helping them access resources to improve their soft skills could be beneficial. For example, they could attend diversity, equity, and inclusion [DE&I] seminars to better understand how to effectively communicate with students and peers from all different backgrounds. Or maybe they don't know how to best support students struggling with mental health and would find resources about mental health on college campuses helpful. Work with your faculty member to decide what type of training would be most useful for them.

> By customizing development training to meet the specific needs of individual faculty members, your mentorship will have a greater impact.

► **Specialty training:** Does your faculty member want to dig into a niche area of their specialty? Are they hoping to improve a specific skill before they teach a new course? Find resources to help this faculty member excel in their career development, whether that be a webinar, lecture, or conference.

By customizing development training to meet the specific needs of individual faculty members, your mentorship will have a greater impact. Faculty will be more confident in their skills and greater trust will be established in your professional relationship.

Long-term support

Faculty development is an ongoing process, and short-term workshops or seminars are not sufficient for sustained improvement. Offering methods of long-term support ensures that faculty members receive continuous guidance as they implement new strategies in their teaching.

► **Mentorship programs:** Many institutions have faculty mentoring programs to support their educators and promote their career growth. The program consists of regular meetings, discussing progress, and establishing paths to achieve goals like promotion or tenure.

► **Coaching:** Faculty coaching can come from within the institution or can be provided through an outside organization. Coaching is usually focused on helping faculty establish very specific methods for achieving their goals. Coaching takes into consideration the personality of the educator, the challenges they face, and what type of systems would help them overcome these challenges. It is less focused on an ongoing interpersonal relationship and more focused on getting at the root of certain problems to help faculty be as effective as possible.

► **Communities of practice:**
A community of practice is a group of people who "share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly." This concept was introduced in 1991 by cognitive anthropologist Jean Lave. This can look like peer groups within or across departments, learning from each other's experiences, and collaborating on new solutions to common problems they face as educators.

> Coaching is usually focused on helping faculty establish very specific methods for achieving their goals.

Continuous support gives your faculty the best opportunity to grow and succeed in their career. Make the greatest impact you can by customizing your mentorship tactics to support your faculty's individual needs.

2. Promote active learning strategies

Hands-on workshops

Hands-on learning offers faculty a practical and immersive approach to acquiring new skills, refining teaching methods, and staying updated on educational trends. These workshops also help your faculty retain what they've learned much more effectively than in a traditional lecture setting.

► **Flipped classrooms:** For educators teaching in a classroom, this is when their students learn about new topics at home and use class time for live problem-solving. For faculty development, you could give your faculty resources that will help them absorb new concepts on their own time. Then, when you meet in person, you could present several scenarios where they would need to arrive at an answer using the concepts presented in the readings.

► **Problem-based learning:** According to Cornell University's Center for Teaching Innovation, problem-based learning is when "students learn about a subject by working in groups to solve an open-ended problem." For faculty development, you could present various news stories about higher education or feedback about real challenges faculty are facing on your campus. Use these pieces of evidence as a basis for a problem-based learning workshop. See how the group of faculty members work together to identify possible solutions.

► **Collaborative projects:** Just like it sounds, collaborative projects rely on faculty members working together to achieve a common goal. If faculty members have been struggling with their first-year classes, they could work together to write "A guide to academically surviving your first year of college." This would not only require collaboration, but it would also put them in the student's shoes. What unique struggles are students facing? How can the faculty perspective help? Could any of this information be useful to add into course syllabi? These are all questions that could be beneficial to explore through a collaborative project.

Hands-on learning is crucial for faculty development because it offers a dynamic and practical approach that enhances engagement, application of knowledge, and the development of pedagogical skills. This experiential learning model contributes to a culture of continuous improvement and helps faculty retain the new skills they've learned.

3. Emphasize inclusive teaching practices

Culturally responsive teaching

Inclusivity in higher education involves recognizing and valuing the diverse backgrounds and perspectives of students. Faculty development programs should focus on cultivating culturally responsive teaching practices — a pedagogy grounded in an educator's ability to teach cross-culturally. Here are some questions you can ask and scenarios you can present to your faculty to improve their culturally responsive teaching skills:

Get to know each of your students. Try one of the following methods:

► Hold short interviews with each student in the first few weeks of class.

► Students can write you "About me" letters.

► Give each of your students a questionnaire to answer at the beginning of the course so you can know all of the pertinent information about them right away.

Lead with inclusivity. Before you dive into a lesson, ask yourself the following:

► Do the examples you're using represent a range of perspectives? Why or why not?

► Is there important cultural context to discuss for every student to understand the material?

► Would any of your students find the information you are teaching distressing? If so, how can you acknowledge this and provide space for all students to learn the material safely?

Use real-world examples to demonstrate the concepts you are teaching in class.

► If you have students from different states or countries, relate certain topics to events that happened in the regions your students are from.

► Do these topics relate to a holiday or cultural practice one of your students may participate in? If so, this is a great opportunity to educate the class about this practice to enrich their understanding and learn from one another's experiences.

When your faculty adopts culturally responsive teaching practices, they are more likely to relate to all students. Inclusive teaching boosts student success and helps your faculty be more effective in their instruction.
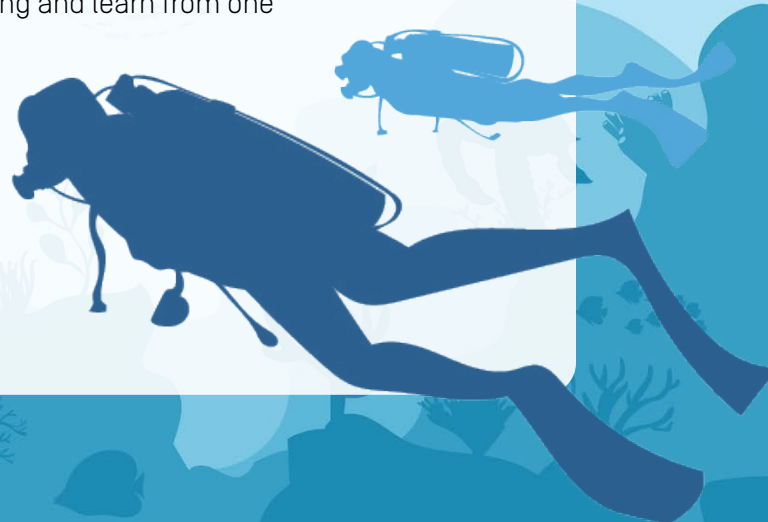
Universal design for learning (UDL)

Implementing universal design principles ensures that educational materials and activities are accessible to all students, regardless of their learning styles, abilities, or backgrounds. Faculty development should provide training on UDL principles, guiding educators on how to design courses that accommodate diverse learning needs and preferences. The three UDL principles are **engagement**, **representation**, and **action and expression**.

Provide multiple means of engagement.

► Find ways to engage all of your students in class.

► Survey students about their interests, strengths, and needs. Incorporate the findings into lessons.

► Use choice menus for working toward goals.

► State learning goals clearly and in a way that feels relevant to students.

Provide multiple means of representation.

► Present information in ways that reach all learners.

► Make it easy for students to adjust font sizes and background colors through technology.

► Provide options for engaging with texts, such as text-to-speech, audiobooks, or partner reading.

Provide multiple means of action and expression.

► Offer purposeful options for students to show what they know.

► Provide calendars and checklists to help students track the subtasks for meeting a learning goal.

► Allow students to show what they know through a variety of formats, such as a poster presentation or a graphic organizer.

► Provide students with access to common assistive technology (AT), such as speech-to-text and text-to-speech.

Educational materials and activities must be accessible to all students, regardless of their learning styles, abilities, or backgrounds. Encourage your faculty to incorporate more UDL principles into their curriculum to boost student success.

Accessibility

In the digital age, technology plays significant role in education. However, not all students may have equal access to technology, whether it is due to physical ability or their financial status.

► Provide access to online courses for your faculty to learn about digital accessibility in higher education.

► If your institution does not already have a department to promote accessibility on campus, consider creating one, like these faculty members did at University of Connecticut.

► Make sure that any resources or technology used for your class are accessible to those with disabilities. For example, if you have a deaf student, make sure all videos you show in class have subtitles. If you have a student who has vision impairment, provide them with auditory-based learning so that they can still engage with the course material.

► Encourage faculty to put copies of their class textbook on reserve in the library. That way students who cannot afford to buy textbooks can still access the needed information.

► Upload articles and PDFs to your learning management system [LMS] so your students can read supplemental materials for free.

► If technology is required for an assignment, make sure it can be accessed for little to no cost through the school's library. Otherwise, this may pose a financial burden to your students and they could struggle to complete the assignment.

Technology is an invaluable resource to incorporate into instruction, but make sure your faculty has a plan to include all students when establishing their curriculum. No student should face barriers to accessing the tools or information they need to academically succeed.

4. Establish a culture of evaluation and continuous improvement

Data-informed decision-making

Faculty development programs should encourage a culture of data-informed decision-making. Institutions should provide resources and training on using data to assess and improve teaching practices.

Student feedback

► Analyzing student course evaluations can provide insight on where a faculty member is succeeding with their instruction and where they are falling short. With the right software, you can track trends per course or semester, and compare those results to years past. Starting with the high-level takeaways can help faculty focus their improvement efforts rather than get bogged down with one piece of negative feedback that may not be indicative of the larger student experience.

Student performance

► Has the faculty member seen significant improvement or deterioration in student outcomes since adopting a new teaching method? This could be a good indication for your faculty member to alter their teacher approach moving forward. The ability to see student performance over time can help demonstrate where a faculty member is succeeding or struggling.

Peer reviews

► Implementing a peer-review process can be a valuable component of faculty development. Colleagues can observe each other's classes, provide constructive feedback, and engage in reflective discussions. This peer-driven approach not only supports individual faculty members in their professional growth but also contributes to a collaborative and supportive academic community. Some software supports both course evaluations and other types of surveys in the same platform, helping you access all of this data from one location.

Having access to many different data points within one platform helps you compare and contrast results to better determine your faculty's performance. This helps you make more informed decisions about a faculty member's career path, and you can provide targeted support where the faculty member needs the most help.

Recognition and rewards

Incentivize faculty members to actively participate in development programs by rewarding their progress. Here are some examples of recognitions and rewards you could provide your faculty:

► Gift a financial bonus.

► Publicly recognize the faculty member, whether that be in a staff meeting, a campus newsletter, an email, or something else.

► Send a personalized card to the faculty member you wish to recognize. Include what specific actions they took to receive this recognition, and offer them encouragement to keep up the good work.

► Give your faculty member a small gift like a sweatshirt from your college or university, a gift card to the local movie theater, tickets to a theater production, or a gift certificate to a local restaurant.

► Ask the faculty member if they would like to join a mentorship program.

► Create an award that can be framed.

When you acknowledge and celebrate the achievements of your educators, they are more likely to continue this positive growth. Keeping your faculty morale high and focused on continuous improvement will improve the overall academic quality of your campus and foster student success.

Conclusion

Faculty development requires a multifaceted approach that considers the individual needs of educators, promotes active and inclusive teaching practices, and emphasizes continuous evaluation and improvement. By adopting these best practices, institutions can create a dynamic and supportive environment that enhances the quality of teaching and ultimately benefits the overall student learning experience.

Interested in learning more about how you can support continuous faculty development? See what Watermark can do for you.

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.