



The U.S. Government Accountability Office's Adjunct Faculty Program

Developing a “Leaders Teach” approach
in a Supreme Audit Institution

December 2025

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The United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) is committed to providing nonpartisan, objective, professional, and reliable information and recommendations, as well as program and technical assistance, to support the United States Congress. Our work has led to a 6-year average return of \$123 for every \$1 invested in our agency. For 20 years, our Learning Center’s Adjunct Faculty Program has been a cornerstone of these efforts. In this program, well-trained analysts and auditors teach our staff to strengthen their audit skills, deepen their knowledge, and develop new technical abilities. I appreciate INTOSAI selecting the Adjunct Faculty Program for this case study and am pleased to share the results of the program’s success fostering excellent professional development for GAO staff.

Gene L. Dodaro

COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES



INTOSAI

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The INTOSAI Capacity Building Committee

In 2016, the Governing Board of the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI) established the Task Force on INTOSAI Auditor Professionalization (TFIAP) to conduct development work on the concepts of auditor competence. The TFIAP was led by the Capacity Building Committee (CBC), one of four INTOSAI Goal Committees that assist the Government Board in implementing INTOSAI’s goal and objectives. The CBC is INTOSAI’s advocate and custodian for SAI capacity development and leads INTOSAI efforts under Goal 2 – capacity building.

In 2023, the TFIAP members planned to compile a series of case studies on professionalization issues from Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs) and selected the U.S. Government Accountability Office’s (GAO) Adjunct Faculty Program as a case study. This document describes GAO’s Adjunct Faculty Program, including efforts to recruit, train, and support instructors.

GAO is proud to share details of this program with the INTOSAI CBC community and believes that this approach can help SAIs increase their capacity development. GAO welcomes feedback, suggestions, and inquiries on the program from other SAIs.

The Government Accountability Office

GAO is an independent, nonpartisan agency in the legislative branch of the United States federal government. Commonly known as the investigative arm of the Congress or the “congressional watchdog,” GAO examines how taxpayer dollars are spent and advises policymakers and executive branch agency heads on ways to make government work more efficiently.

GAO’s mission is to support the Congress in meeting its constitutional responsibilities and help improve the performance and ensure the accountability of the federal government for the benefit of the American people. GAO’s three mission core values—accountability, integrity, and reliability—form the basis for all its work. These mission values work in concert with GAO’s three core people values—that its staff are valued, respected, and treated fairly—to create a synergy that is essential for GAO to achieve its mission.

GAO was established in 1921, when the Budget and Accounting Act transferred auditing responsibilities, accounting, and claims functions from the Treasury Department (in the executive branch) to this new agency. GAO was created because federal financial management was in disarray after World War I. Wartime spending had driven up the national debt, and the Congress saw that it needed more information and better control over expenditures. The act made GAO independent of the executive branch and gave it a broad mandate to investigate how federal dollars are spent. GAO’s Comptroller General is appointed to a 15-year term.

GAO has 15 functional mission teams of analysts, financial auditors, and specialists to support its three external strategic goals—addressing challenges to the well-being and financial security of the American people; helping Congress respond to changing security threats and challenges of global interdependence; and helping transform the federal government to address national challenges. These mission teams focus on topics such as contracting and procurement; national security and intelligence; the nation’s care for disadvantaged populations; stewardship and accountability of financial resources; regulatory oversight of financial markets; waste, fraud and abuse; federal healthcare; justice, security, and emergency preparedness; information technology and cyber security; U.S. foreign policy and international economic interests; the nation’s land and water resources; the nation’s physical infrastructure; science and technology; and the nation’s fiscal health and the federal workforce.

In addition, GAO has several staff and administrative offices that work to support the agency’s mission teams, the Congress, and the American people. For example, GAO’s Office of General Counsel provides legal counsel to the entire agency and provides dedicated attorneys to each mission team who advise staff during the audit and reporting processes.

Source: background image | GAO



GAO's Learning Culture

GAO has built a culture of learning based on requirements for analysts and auditors to obtain professional education credits. Specifically, to meet GAO's Government Auditing Standards (the "Yellow Book") GAO's analyst and auditor staff must complete 80 hours of continuing education credits (called Continuing Professional Education credits or "CPE") in each 2-year cycle, including 24 credits directly related to the government environment, government auditing, or the specific environment in which the entity operates. If analyst and auditor staff do not complete these requirements, GAO does not permit staff to perform Yellow Book audits until they have earned enough CPE credits to bring them into compliance.



Image source: GAO

"The continuing competence of the audit organization's personnel depends, in part, on an appropriate level of CPE so that auditors maintain the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to conduct the GAGAS engagement." -Government Auditing Standards, 2018 Revision

To help GAO's analyst and auditor staff meet these requirements, GAO's training center—called the "Learning Center"—develops in-person, virtual, and hybrid courses. The courses vary in length from quick refreshers to in-depth sessions. The Learning Center also produces e-learning, training materials, tip sheets, and more. In fiscal year 2024, the Learning Center sponsored almost 800 class sessions. While Learning Center staff and contractors teach some classes, more than half of the classes are taught by certified instructors from the Adjunct Faculty Program. New analyst staff participate in the Professional Development Program¹ (PDP) where Adjunct Faculty Instructors teach them 14 classes on audit skills over the course of 2 years.

Teaching helps me to ensure I stay up-to-date on our agency's priorities and messages and allows me to meet new staff and staff from other parts of the organization.

Furthermore, I find having to present concepts and materials to others helps me practice ways of delivering information and seeing how clear I am vs. how clear I think I am.

~Certified Instructor

¹ Entry-level staff develop competencies and experiences that prepare them to perform as GAO analysts through the PDP. PDP staff rotate through at least three engagements over the 2-year course of the program, during which they encounter different management styles and team cultures on diverse projects. An advisor meets with each staff member to provide guidance in adjusting to the organization and GAO's work. Advisors coordinate with managers and supervisors to ensure that PDP staff receive appropriate feedback, coaching, and on-the-job training.

Leaders-as-Teachers Program

“Docendo discimus.” When we teach, we learn. Supreme Audit Institutions can benefit greatly from developing and effectively maintaining a Leaders-as-Teachers program. Under such a program, experienced staff step into the classroom (virtual or in-person) to teach newer staff how to perform key audit tasks. Effective teaching by experienced auditors who have “been there and done that” helps staff to learn, remember, and, most importantly, apply the course material.

Building on learning principles that adults learn best when they are interested and involved, instructors facilitate discussion of the material through thoughtful, probing questions. Instructors also teach using dynamic, on-point lectures, vivid language, illustrative examples, and storytelling with messages that stick. As a result, our staff become engaged learners who are excited to learn more about the topic.

In a Leaders-as-Teachers program, instructors improve their skills in collaboration, influence, and inclusiveness. New staff taking courses feel more engaged in the work and learn audit-specific skills and knowledge. Meanwhile, the auditing entity benefits from the organizational growth that comes from fostering a culture of learning.² Audit entities also benefit because their training centers do not need to detail staff away from audit work for long periods of time or seek outside contract support to teach the classes.

²Leaders as Teachers, Engaging Employees in High-Performance Learning, The Training Associates in cooperation with The Association for Talent Development Research.

GAO's Adjunct Faculty Program

GAO has had a Leaders-as-Teachers program, or “Adjunct Faculty Program,” in place since 2006. Under this program, GAO has certified more than 200 staff as instructors, drawn from the analyst, auditor, and operations support communities. Instructors teach classes for our approximately 2,500 analyst staff on topics ranging from core audit skills such as evaluating internal controls and developing report messages, to navigating difficult meeting situations and providing effective feedback. Instructors also teach courses for our analyst and additional 1,000 non-analyst staff on leadership; applied computer skills; research methods; and other cross-cutting issues.

Typically, instructors teach a particular class 2 or 3 times a year, balancing teaching with their assigned work. Unlike a train-the-trainer program in which instructors learn how to teach specific content, instructors come to the Adjunct Faculty Program with previously developed expertise on a particular subject matter. In the instructor training (described below) they focus on becoming proficient in adult learning theories and teaching techniques that they can apply in multiple courses.

The Adjunct Faculty Program allows GAO to achieve costs savings since it helps analysts and auditors to fulfill their CPE requirements without having to bring in outside contract instructors. The Adjunct Faculty Program allows GAO to achieve costs savings since it helps analysts and auditors to fulfill their CPE requirements without having to bring in outside contract instructors. The Adjunct Faculty Program has contributed to GAO's learning culture and the agency's results demonstrate the positive effects of this learning culture. GAO has ranked high in the Partnership for Public Service's³ Best Places to Work listings since the Partnership's program started in 2005. For example, for 5 years running GAO has ranked the highest for Midsized Federal Agencies as the best place to work. In 2025, Forbes also recognized GAO for being one of America's 77 best employers for the last 10 years. This excellence is also reflected in our retention data—in fiscal year⁴ 2024, GAO retained 95 percent of its staff, or 97 percent when excluding retirements.



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GAO's Adjunct Faculty Programs is one of the pillars of our continual learning culture and contributes to GAO's high retention rates. The exchange between students and instructors enriches both by keeping instructors' skills sharp and developing and enhancing the skills of the students.

~Orice Brown Williams, GAO Chief Operating Officer

³ The Partnership for Public Service is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that works to build a better government and a stronger democracy.

⁴ The fiscal year is the accounting period of the U.S. federal government. It begins on October 1 and ends on September 30 of the next calendar year. Each fiscal year is identified by the calendar year in which it ends. For example, fiscal year 2024 began on October 1, 2023, and ended on September 30, 2024.

Recruiting Staff to Serve as Instructors

Open Season

To recruit GAO staff to be instructors, the Adjunct Faculty Program Manager conducts a yearly “Open Season” process. In this process, Learning Center Course Managers determine how many classes of each course to offer, often based on prior year needs. They then identify the number of new instructors they will need to teach in the next fiscal year and share their needs with the Adjunct Faculty Program Manager. The Adjunct Faculty Program Manager then issues an agency-wide notice that details the courses with openings for new instructors.

Interested staff apply by completing a “Partnership Agreement and Statement of Interest” in which unit management attests that the employee has at least 2 years of subject matter expertise, has communication skills to present information in an easy-to-understand manner, and possesses facilitation skills to actively involve participants in their learning. Meanwhile, the staff members attest that they will complete the coursework and certification process, collaborate with the Course Manager, teach courses in accordance with performance standards, and continue to improve their teaching skills.



Image source: GAO

INSIGHT: The Partnership Agreement is important because it helps ensure that the unit management is committed to dedicating the employees’ time to the stewardship effort and the staff member has the backing of management in embarking on the training program.

Staff members also complete a “Statement of Interest” in which they explain why they would like to become a Certified Instructor and describe their relevant experience for the course they wish to teach.



INSIGHT: The Statement of Interest is important because it demonstrates to management the prospective instructor’s commitment to teaching and it encourages instructors to think from the very beginning about why they want to teach. With this grounding, they are more receptive to putting in the hard work to improve their teaching.

In the Open Season process, the Adjunct Faculty Program typically receives more applicants than available openings. Course managers review the applications and determine who to select. Selected staff then work with the Program Manager to sign up for the foundational training. The Program Manager contacts staff who were not selected and encourages them to apply again at a future date.

Instructor Partnership Agreement and Statement of Interest



The Learning Center (LC) trains GAO staff to teach the majority of LC courses because they can relate their subject matter expertise and practical work experiences to the course content.

To begin the Instructor process, the staff member must meet the following minimum criteria and expectations:

- be a permanent employee with 1 year of GAO experience,
- be considered an expert in the subject matter they plan to teach, with at least 2 years' experience,
- have communication skills to present information in an easy to understand way, and
- possess facilitation skills to actively involve participants in their learning.

By signing below, team/unit management attests that the staff member has met these criteria and expectations.

By signing below, the staff member attests that they will:

- complete the entire training curriculum to become a Certified Instructor (coursework, observation for certification),
- collaborate with the Course Manager to prepare to teach,
- teach courses in accordance with the Instructor Performance Standards, and
- attend advanced instruction skills training.



Target Course/Curriculum and Course Manager
(if you are applying during Open Season, list all of the courses you are interested in)

Staff Band level, team/unit, location, and years of GAO experience

Staff member _____ Signature _____

DPM _____ Signature _____

Managing Director _____ Signature _____

Statement of Interest



1 Please explain why you would like to become a Certified Instructor.

Blank text area for response 1.

2 Please describe your relevant experience for your target course/curriculum.

Blank text area for response 2.

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DOCENDO DISCIMUS BY TEACHING, WE LEARN

Image source: GAO

Expert Track

While Open Season management serves to supply most of the instructors that Course Managers need to teach courses, there are some courses for which extensive prior expertise is required. For example, teaching a class on research methodology requires an instructor with a doctorate on the topic. Or a law course may require a GAO attorney to teach. In these special cases, the Adjunct Faculty Program allows these staff to bypass the Open Season and apply directly to the program, become Provisional Instructors, and sign up for the instruction training. Staff on the expert track still fill out a Partnership Agreement and Statement of Intent and get approval.



INSIGHT: About 72 percent of GAO analysts have advanced degrees in their field of study. Because our work spans the full range of government programs and spending, we must hire and retain a multidisciplinary staff. GAO staff have wide-ranging expertise from many academic fields, including engineering, biology, computer science, cybersecurity, public policy, accounting, law, physics, economics, criminal justice, finance, business, and nursing, among others.

Instructor Call

In addition to the Open Season, Course Managers have another way of recruiting instructors to teach classes, particularly if they would prefer to have experienced instructors teach the course. In this case, the Course Manager can issue an “Instructor Call.” The Instructor Call is advertised in a monthly Instructor Newsletter and lists the number of openings as well as desired experience and grade level. Then, Certified Instructors who have already completed the training and observation program apply to teach the class. They may be motivated by wanting to teach another course or else they may want to switch the course they teach. For example, maybe they have taught a course on referencing fundamentals for 5 years and now would like to switch to teach a course on report writing and reviewing strategies.

Leveraging adjunct faculty instructors to develop and enhance auditor skillsets provides a unique opportunity for new staff to access a wealth of organizational knowledge and experience. By adding personal examples and perspectives from the audit trail, instructors can offer new staff real-world scenarios to anchor their understanding of key concepts and objectives from the trainings. It provides new staff with a point of reference to reflect on when faced with challenges in their own work.

~Professional Development Program Managing Director

Training Instructors to Teach and Certifying Instructors

Foundational Instructor Training

To prepare new staff to teach, the Adjunct Faculty Program requires them to take an “Instruction Theory, Technique, and Practice” course offered over three consecutive weeks. This course is taught by the Adjunct Faculty Program Manager. The first section focuses on adult learning theory—how adults learn differently than children.⁵ The second section surveys techniques for teaching, including how to teach in a virtual environment and manage the virtual platform. The course is anchored on four performance standards: setting the stage for effective learning, presenting information in easy-to-understand manner, facilitating participation so that participants are actively involved in their learning, and managing classroom challenges with poise.⁶

The next week, participants conduct a “dry run” in which they practice operating the virtual classroom and working with the producer to prepare to teach. Then, the participants try out their teaching skills in a practicum session in which they teach a 15-minute segment from their “target class.” They receive immediate feedback from their peers in the session and from the Adjunct Faculty Program Manager. The feedback is in the form of “glows” that highlight what the instructor did well and “grows” that highlight areas for instructor improvement. The Adjunct Faculty Program Manager also adds techniques to try when the new instructors start teaching. The participants view a recording of their session and send the Adjunct Faculty Program Manager their reflections on the session.

I teach to create an environment where staff can learn useful information to do their jobs better. I enjoy trying to establish environments where there is interaction among the participants—it is satisfying to set the stage and then sort of step back, providing light guidance as the participants talk among themselves and share information.

~Certified Instructor

⁵Adult learning, or andragogy, principles include that adults must want to learn and must feel like they need to learn. Further, adults learn by doing, particularly when learning focuses on problem solving and learners are able to build on their experiences.

⁶Adapted from the International Board of Standards for Training, Performance, and Instruction.

Instructor Initial Certification

After completing the training, within the next year, new instructors:

- observe an experienced instructor teach the target class and take notes on the teaching techniques they see in use,
- teach the class once or twice,
- are observed by the Adjunct Faculty Program Manager or designee for certification based on the performance standards, and
- participate in a 1-hour coaching and feedback session with the Adjunct Faculty Program Manager or designee.



Source image | GAO

After this observation session, new instructors are either certified or observed again to demonstrate the coaching in action. Once certified, instructors commit to teaching at least twice a year to maintain their active status.

GAO offers two initial certifications—for the in-person and virtual classrooms.



INSIGHT: The foundational training does not end when class sessions end. Rather, the certification process serves as the capstone of the training program. From a learning perspective, the Adjunct Faculty Program Manager or designee observes the instructor’s application of the theories and techniques in the live classroom setting, usually months later. This is a form of “spaced learning” in which instructors have to reach back to remember what they have learned to be able to apply it. Following their observation, the instructor fills out a “Post-instruction Reflection Tool” where they can document their lessons learned. Then, in the following coaching and feedback session, the Program Manager or designee highlights where the instructor successfully implemented teaching techniques, points out opportunities for improvement, and reminds them of techniques to try the next time they teach.

Senior Instructor Certification

Experienced instructors can apply for certification as a Senior Instructor. To qualify for this certification, Certified Instructors must meet the following requirements:

- Have taught at least 100 hours at GAO
- Have taught at least twice in each of the last 2 years
- Have received an endorsement from their Course Manager
- Complete three Advanced Instruction Curriculum courses (see below)
- Be observed teaching, complete a self-reflection, then receive a coaching and feedback session.



Source image | GAO

Teaching has been one of the most satisfying aspects of my career at GAO because it allows me to share with new employees what I have learned over three decades. And in that way, I'm giving back to GAO and the broader accountability community while connecting with a new generation of auditors and analysts.

~Certified Instructor



INSIGHT: The Senior Instructor Program provides a goal for instructors who stay active in the program and rewards accomplishment. When instructors stay in the program for a long period of time, they get valuable teaching experience and improve their skills. When Senior Instructors introduce themselves in their classes, their senior status adds to their credibility.

Check-in Observations

Three years after their certification, Instructors are prompted to schedule a Check-in Observation. The Adjunct Faculty Program Manager or designee observes them teaching, they complete a self-reflection tool and then take part in a coaching and feedback session. This repeats every three years.



Source image | GAO



INSIGHT: The Check-in Observation is an opportunity for the Adjunct Faculty Program to provide instructors with tips and tricks to help them improve their teaching.

Ongoing Supporting for Instructors

As instructors typically teach 2 or 3 times a year, it is critical that the Adjunct Faculty Program provides ongoing support for instructors. This comes in the form of participant evaluations, 1-hour courses on adult learning theories and techniques, a “lunch-and-learn” series, an extensive collection of tip sheets, and a monthly newsletter.

Evaluations

Course Managers and the Program Manager review class evaluations submitted by participants and Course Managers share them with instructors. The evaluations help the instructors learn what they are doing well and where they can improve. Depending on the evaluations, instructors may need additional coaching or training before being given an opportunity to teach again.

Advanced Instruction Curriculum

Instructors can take classes that help them to deepen their knowledge of adult learning theory and sharpen their teaching techniques. Topics for these 1-hour sessions include facilitation techniques, storytelling, effective debriefing, and using evaluations to improve teaching.



INSIGHT: The Advanced Instruction Curriculum classes serve as continual learning for the instructors. In addition, the instructors get to know each other in the classes forming a community of practice.

GAO has a range of guidance documents to help analysts carry out their work. These documents, while vital to ensuring consistently quality work, don't always capture the myriad nuances involved at the heart of conducting audit work. Adjunct Faculty instructors breathe life into documents like the Yellow Book, showing how we can internalize their provisions as we grow our knowledge and skills as analysts and put them into practice in our day-to-day work.

~Professional Development Program Managing Director



INSTRUCTOR TOOLBOX

Instructor Toolbox

The Adjunct Faculty Program tip sheets called “Instructor Tools” that are available on-demand on the GAO intranet to remind instructors about adult learning theories and techniques.

Selected Instructor Tools

- Instructor Preparation Checklist
- Best Practices for Co-Instruction
- Characteristics and Skills of Motivating Instructors
- Post-instruction Reflection Tool
- Using Effective Language in the Classroom
- Effectively Using the Chat in the Virtual Classroom
- Pacing in the Virtual Environment
- Participants with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties
- Adult Learning Principles
- The Forgetting Curve
- Adult Learning Resources
- Hook in the Class
- Introductions: Instructor and Participant
- Create a Safe and Inclusive Learning Environment
- Framework to Present Course Content
- Making Content Stick
- Tell GAO Stories with Success
- Using Slides Effectively in Teaching
- Questions to Promote High-level Thinking
- Instructors Can Answer, Reflect, Re-direct, or Defer Participant Questions
- Responding to Challenging Questions
- Debrief Discussions and Exercises
- Increase Participation in the Virtual Classroom
- Level of Difficulty Affects Participant Engagement
- Address Challenging Behaviors

Source image | GAO

BEST PRACTICES FOR CO-INSTRUCTION

Before the Session

- Meet your co-instructor before the Technical Dry Run.
- Identify who will take the lead for each module.
- Identify how you will complement each other's teaching styles.
- Clarify how you will communicate with each other during the session (e.g., private chat).
- Determine if and how you will interject comments when the other is teaching (jump in or prompt note in the chat).
- Plan how you will ensure seamless transitions from instructor to instructor.

During the Session

- Respect your co-instructor to maintain credibility.
- Pace yourself so you don't cut into your co-instructor's teaching time.
- Be patient; try not to interrupt your co-instructor if you think they missed something. They may cover Key Learning Points later or in a different way.
- Check in with each other while a breakout exercise is going on to discuss how the session is going and whether you need to make any changes.
- Support your co-instructor whenever possible. You can research answers to questions to share with the class and be prepared to step in during technical glitches.
- Pay close attention while your co-instructor is teaching so that you can later tap back to points they made and that participants made.

After the Session

- Meet with your Co-instructor to discuss how the class went.
- Consider lessons learned and discuss whether any changes will be needed next time.
- Answer the question in the Post-Instruction Reflection Tool about what you learned from your Co-Instructor.

INSTRUCTOR TOOL

Hook in the Class

The Hook
Participants decide quickly how much attention they are going to give a class. Hook them in!

Be Creative
Think of creative ways to gain participant attention and retain their interest whenever starting a class.

- Tell a story**
Share a story that gets the class interested in the topic and thinking about it in new ways.
- Ask an intriguing question**
Pay attention to the responses and fine-tune your question the next time you teach.
- Share meaningful statistics**
What statistics about the topic will be memorable?
- Throw out unexpected facts**
Are there facts about the topic that will make them say "wow!"?
- Show engaging pictures**
Have an engaging image? Work with your Course Manager on whether you need copyright permissions.
- Describe an interesting thought**
Have you had an "A-ha!" moment about the topic?

Source: Illustrations | GAO

INSTRUCTOR TOOL

Level of Difficulty Affects PARTICIPANT ENGAGEMENT

Adults learn best when they are challenged but not overwhelmed. Think about how to create "desirable difficulties" in your class.

DESIRABLE DIFFICULTIES...
are desirable because they trigger encoding and retrieval processes that supports learning, comprehension, and remembering. If, however, the learner does not have the background knowledge or skills to respond to them successfully, they become undesirable difficulties.
—Elizabeth and Robert Bjork, Making Things Hard on Yourself But in a Good Way: Creating Desirable Difficulties

Level of participant engagement (Y-axis: Low to High)
Level of difficulty (X-axis: Too Easy to Too Difficult)

- Too Easy**
Participants may:
• Check out and multitask
• Feel disappointed that their WiFM isn't being met
- In the Zone**
Participants may:
• Feel engaged and curious
- Too Difficult**
Participants may:

INSTRUCTOR NEWSLETTER

The Adjunct Faculty Program issues a monthly Instructor Newsletter with teaching tips, spotlights on new and updated Instructor Tools, links to articles on teaching, and program news.



Spotlight Instructor Tool
Desktop Layouts for Virtual Instruction
Have you wondered about all the ways there are to set up your computer and monitors for virtual instruction? Check out the brand new Instructor Desktop Layout Instructor Tool. (attached)



Highlights from the Research

Found this to be an interesting overview of ideas around cognitive load theory. (Cognitive Load Theory is based on the model of human information processing, that memory has three main parts: sensory, working, and long-term) [Cognitive Load Theory: Emerging Trends and Innovations - some notes](#) In particular, found the second section to be insightful. Interleaving (mixing different types of content) is beneficial when students need to learn to discriminate between seemingly different problems that actually require similar solutions. And the benefits of interleaving also come from students identifying subtle differences in solution approaches.

The Adjunct Faculty Program was featured in [INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF GOVERNMENT AUDITING](#). Take a look! Thank you!

Highlights from

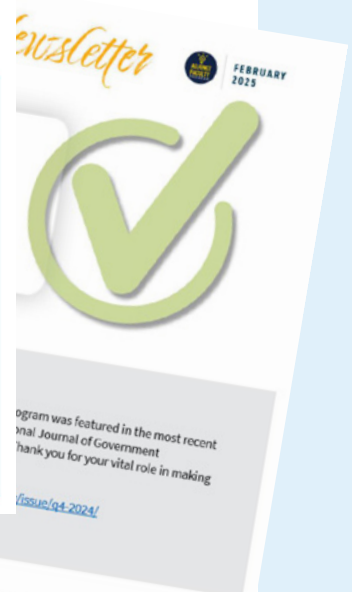
In the book [The Power of Moments](#) by Chip Heath and Dan Heath, moments of elevation, insight, pride and connection and they remember endings. In your



Spotlight Instructor Tool
Many classes have breakout rooms or table groups, followed by debriefing. Remember—debriefing is an opportunity for learning. See the new updated Instructor Tool on Debriefing for tips on building excellence into your debriefs.



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Recognizing and Rewarding Instructors

Awards Ceremony

The Learning Center hosts an annual GAO-wide awards ceremony, attended by the Comptroller General and other executive staff, to recognize instructors who were certified during the year and to give the following awards. Learning Center management, Course Managers and the Adjunct Faculty Program Manager work together to provide the following awards:



Source image | GAO

Instructor Excellence Award

This award goes to Certified Instructors who have regularly demonstrated excellence in instruction.

Organizational Learning Champion Award and Appreciation Award

These awards go to Instructors, Subject Matter Experts, and other GAO staff who have been instrumental in significantly improving the quality, content, or impact of learning at GAO.



Source image | GAO

CPE Credits for Teaching

When instructors teach classes that qualify for CPEs, the instructor can claim three times the number of CPE as the class, reflecting preparation and teaching time.

Instructor Self-assessment

GAO staff receive performance reviews each fiscal year. Instructors can highlight their teaching experience in their self-assessments that they complete as part of this process in support of GAO’s “Working with Others” performance competency.

Teaching actually terrifies me and that feeling has never eased, even as I close in on my Senior Instructor certification. Teaching is one of the more challenging agency stewardship activities I am involved with at GAO. But teaching is what helps our organization maintain its reputation.

Without instructors who have experienced performance auditing, how would our colleagues know what to expect and assess for themselves whether what they are experiencing or seeing on the audit trail is “typical?”

Being a certified instructor gives me confidence in the classroom and on the audit trail. In turn, having a solid foundation of knowledge and acknowledgment of my experience inside and outside the classroom, allows me to go a step deeper in challenging my colleagues to learn and share their experiences.

Finally, being a certified instructor provides regular practice in presenting information, listening to others, and connecting people and ideas. What could be any better?

~Certified Instructor

Tips for Setting up an Adjunct Faculty Program

- In developing the program, GAO learned that it is important to get upper management buy-in to provide staffing resources that help ensure the program's success. Without dedicated staff time, there is no Adjunct Faculty Program. The Partnership Agreement has been important tools in supporting this effort, documenting management agreement that the staff member has the experience and skills to teach and that the staff member's time will be well-spent teaching.
- In the beginning, the program required instructors to become recertified every 3 years. In the intervening years, this effort fell away. In 2025 the Adjunct Faculty Program re-instated a quality control observation, the Check-in Observation referenced above. This observation allows the Adjunct Faculty Program Manager or designee to help ensure that instructors are providing quality instruction and to refresh instructors on teaching tips and techniques.
- An Adjunct Faculty Program of the scale of GAO's program requires a Program Manager who can devote most of their time to management and administration of the program, to include instruction and instructor observations. For a smaller program, this role could be combined with other duties.
- To implement an Adjunct Faculty Program, SAIs should consider how to "scale" the effort to meet their needs. Specifically, they should identify their training needs and the number of Adjunct Faculty instructors needed to meet the demand. While GAO has more than 200 instructors, a smaller SAI could create a cadre of 10-20 instructors teaching classes or partner with other SAIs in the region.

GAO's Adjunct Faculty Program represents more than a singular talent development activity—it embodies the essence of a systems-based learning organization. Anchored on a shared vision of continual learning and improvement, the instructors are empowered by executive leadership and agency-wide support to transfer their knowledge and experience across functional, operational, and hierarchical lines. Through their instruction and continual development as instructors, they also deepen their own expertise and mastery of their profession by enhancing their communications skills and keeping current with the latest best practices and policies. As highlighted in the quotes in this case study, instructors and leaders reference the impact the program has had on organizational talent development, retention, and succession. Through this program, GAO's workforce is able to rapidly address knowledge and skills gaps and adapt to the ever-changing landscape of government accountability.

~GAO Chief Learning Officer Ruth Strande

Conclusion

The GAO Adjunct Faculty Program has been a tremendous resource for the agency. Over the course of 20 years, the program has grown in size from a handful of instructors to hundreds. The program has also grown in sophistication with a wide variety of tools and resources to support instructors in teaching. Developing the program took long-term planning, vision, and hard work.

Today the program helps GAO to effectively develop staff members in building their audit skills. Certified instructors benefit from using the instructor skillset to help participants to learn, remember and apply the material. At the same time, the instructors benefit by deepening their knowledge of agency procedures and taking on a new challenge in their mid-career years.

Are you interested in setting up an Adjunct Faculty Program at your SAI? Would you like to see a more detailed program description? Contact the U.S. Government Accountability Office by emailing media@gao.gov.

Source Image: GAO building; demerzel21/stock.adobe.com | GAO-25-1017310053





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