

One Size Does Not Fit All: A Look into Three Distinctly Different Faculty Centers

Jace Hargis, Ph.D.
University of the Pacific

Alison Morrison-Shetlar, Ph.D.
University of Central Florida

Abstract

This article will examine three distinctively different sizes and types of Faculty Centers: a large Research-intensive institution, a medium sized Comprehensive Public University and a small Private Institution. Brief backgrounds and missions of each center will be shared, followed by commonalities and differences in Centers' programs due to their specific audiences. A comparison of the Centers' activities and development opportunities will be discussed. Recommendations which could be generalized to other settings will be presented for ten different attributes common to all Centers as well as associated strategies which might lend themselves more to a particular type of institution.

Introduction

Sorcinelli et. al. (2004) outlined the evolution and future of faculty development as the Age of the Scholar, Teacher, Developer, Learner; and now of the Network. The key elements in the current Age of Network are transforming, scholarship, diversity, leadership, and the environment. Other factors for success include ownership, administrative support, sustained activities, and faculty involvement. There are many common themes, challenges, and successes amongst faculty developers regardless of location, type of institution, resources, mission, etc. However, just as there are Carnegie classifications for universities, there would also seem to be differences in how faculty development is pursued in different environments. Historically, faculty development organizations in higher education began in 1974 with the Professional and Organizational Development (POD) followed by the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE) in 1981, and programs offered by the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) beginning in 1990. Regional programs such as the Southern Regional Faculty and Instructional Development Consortium (SRFIDC) were developed in 1991, and later, local/state organizations were founded, including the Florida Faculty Development Consortium (FFDC) which began in 2005. These organizations provided developers, many of whom were often the only developer on a campus, the chance to step out of their institutions to collaborate, share, and meet with others with similar goals.

Ubiquitous among Centers is the literature frequently cited, including: *Scholarship Reconsidered* (Boyer, 1990); *Understanding by Design* (Wiggins & McTighe, 2004); *Tools for Teaching* (Davis, 1993); *Handbook for Classroom Instruction* (Marzano, et. al., 2001); *Teaching with Your Mouth Shut* (Finkel, 2000); *Teaching Tips: Strategies, Research, and Theory for College and University Teachers* (McKeachie, 2005); and *What the Best College Teachers Do* (Bain, 2004). These literature sets are commonly provided to newly hired faculty and kept on hand to assist faculty in redesigning their courses.

The scholarship on faculty development has significantly increased over the past decade. Historic perspectives of faculty development have been interpreted in many ways as described throughout the literature, which address instructional, professional and organizational development, as well as career and personal development (Nelson, 1983; Riegle, 1987). Sabbatical leaves have long been considered a part of faculty development as well as a multitude of funding opportunities for workshops, seminars, week-long events and summer teaching and research grants.

Along with professional societies and literature on development, faculty development workshops, which range in duration, content, approach and philosophy, attempt to provide an efficient (although possibly ineffective) method for transferring information to faculty who wish to enhance their teaching and student learning. Each center develops its own unique philosophy and mission to address faculty needs, typically by using a combination of what has worked in the past for other centers while continuing to try and understand the specifics of their faculty needs and institutional goals. This may differ considerably from a large research institution to a small, private university.

Three Types of Institutions and Center Missions

Public Research University

The research university examined is a large institution (50,000) in the southeast United States which focuses on teaching and research with a diverse body of both full-time and part-time students, many who participate through distributed learning. The institution has undergone rapid growth from 1000 students when it was established in 1963 to now over 50,000. Approximately 20% of the 50,000 students reside in on-campus or affiliated campus housing. The university currently offers 140 Baccalaureate programs; 97 Master's programs and 28 Doctoral programs with about 1,200 full time faculty members and 400 part time faculty members.

The institution has colleges of Arts & Humanities, Biomedical Science, Business Administration, Education, Engineering & Computer Science, Health & Public Affairs, Nursing, Optics and Photonics, Hospitality Management, and Sciences and a newly approved College of Medicine, which will open its doors to a first cohort of students in 2009.

The Faculty Teaching and Learning Center (FTLC) was established in 1999. The FTLC's mission is to support and promote faculty in their roles as teachers, researchers, scholars, and as members of the university and the community. Essential to such support is the enhancement of faculty success at any career stage and the promotion of collegiality. The services, resources, and events offered through the faculty center are available to all university instructors, including full- and part-time faculty, and graduate teaching assistants. The faculty and staff of the faculty center seek to promote and support 1) excellence in teaching and learning, 2) successful research and creative endeavors, 3) professional fulfillment, and 4) partnerships with other academic institutions and the regional, national, and international community.

Public Comprehensive University

The medium sized (16,000 students) comprehensive university which is classified as a Master's level institution with a few doctoral programs is also located in the southeastern part of the United States. The institution houses about 2000 of its students in on-campus housing; the remainder are commuter students. The university was started in 1972 and at that time offered only upper level undergraduate courses. There are 550 full time faculty members in five different colleges of Health, Arts and Science, Business, Education and Human Services, and Computing, Engineering and Construction. Currently, 50 undergraduate degrees and 26 graduate degrees are offered. The primary focus is on instruction, with scholarship and community involvement playing vital roles.

The Faculty Teaching Enhancement Center opened in 2000. Its mission is to support all faculty members in teaching, research, and service, and to facilitate growth of a university

culture that champions innovation, the use of technology, cooperation, and ongoing professional development and research.

Private Teaching University

The small private teaching university is located in the northwestern United States, with approximately 6,000 students, practically all of whom reside in on- or near-campus housing. The institution was chartered in 1851 and offers 65 undergraduate, graduate, and professional degree programs in nine colleges including Arts and Science, International Studies, Engineering and Computer Science, Education, Music, Business, Pharmacy and Health Science, Law and Dentistry. The Law and Dentistry programs are housed in cities about one hour from the main campus. There are 375 full time faculty members.

The Faculty Teaching Excellence Center began in 2005. The center's mission is to support the pursuit of excellence in teaching and learning. The center faculty and staff provide services and resources to assist faculty in becoming more effective, active teachers and scholars, subsequently enabling students to become more engaged stakeholders in the construction of their conceptual process.

Faculty Development in a Nutshell

Assisting faculty members in their pursuit of excellence has most likely been around since the first university was established, but formally, faculty development centers are relatively new to the academe. The intent of this article is not to be all-inclusive, either in types of centers or the full possibilities of development opportunities, however, some of the more common approaches to faculty development will be shared to build a context for subsequent differentiations cited for each of the three types of universities explored. Therefore the data is presented to assist faculty developers in a variety of institution type and not meant to be used as broad generalizations.

Faculty centers primarily focus on assisting faculty members with improving their teaching, although many also assist in scholarship endeavors (for example, assessment, statistical analysis, and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning) and service obligations such as organizing online course management sites and grant support. Traditional faculty development centers offer a variety of workshops, seminars, and demonstrations to showcase effective models of teaching and active learning strategies. In addition, centers may organize internal and external speakers, support Faculty Fellows programs, offer internal conferences, and finance faculty travel to teaching conferences. Additionally, centers may provide teaching, promotion and tenure resources, offer confidential classroom observations and graduate teaching workshops. A major role of most centers is to organize and mentor newly hired faculty members.

Some centers offer assistance in instructional technology, in the form of discussion, hands-on training, and equipment loans where resources are available.

Analysis of Common Programs Offered

There are commonalities between faculty development centers, as well as differences in centers' goals. Originally, the authors considered tabulating the differences between institutions gathered through observations, working at various institutions, informal surveys and reviewing websites. While this is a clean method of putting the information together, it ultimately leaned too much toward categorization that was efficient, but not effective. Therefore, an approach to avoid an overly reductionist format resulted in the following narrative, which shares the strengths and challenges of each center type.

Workshops, presentations, seminars, and demonstrations

All three center types provide broad, universal, and generic information on pedagogical methods. The Research Intensive institution focused on pedagogical best practices and

discipline specific scholarship, experimental design and statistical analysis; whereas the comprehensive institution tended to provide an on-going connection between new best practices and collaboration; and private schools assisted in leading and developing best practices in teaching. Challenges in this area for all institutions include low attendance and participation. Large institutions found it difficult to convince faculty that the center can offer topics which would both interest and assist them. Comprehensive challenges included making the connections between what the workshop offered and how it related to teaching, as well as providing low threshold applications, that the faculty could take and use immediately. Private schools struggled to provide high quality, pertinent topics, which faculty were not already using.

Classroom Observations

All centers used faculty initiated, confidential classroom observations to increase insightful, reflective metacognition, which can transfer directly into instructional modifications. Large institutions used this practice to change instructors' ways of thinking and organizing concepts for teaching, which enhanced how research is aligned with classroom events. Mid-sized and smaller schools used these to address on-going continuous improvement for innovative teaching strategies, reflection and modification of practices. The major challenge for all faculty members was the potential risk of opening up their classrooms to others. Convincing faculty of the intent, which was to observe and collect data for non-evaluative purposes, was also challenging.

Faculty Fellows

For all institutions, Faculty Fellows are faculty who are selected by a competitive process and asked to provide a dedicated service of expertise to the center. They can provide universal buy-in, broad scope applications, and a varied and ever-growing breadth of expertise. In research institutes, Fellows can guide and lead discipline-specific initiatives, which can

empower traditional researchers to spend their time efficiently on improving their teaching. In comprehensive schools Fellows can enhance an ever-present group of faculty who can operate in both pedagogical mode and scholarship to learn and share their findings. The challenges for all include a lack of funds and identifying viable, interested faculty as well as developing a useful, global product for sharing with others. In addition, for schools that focus on teaching, it can be a challenge to identify faculty who can share their methods in a broad, generic way to the greater university community.

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning uses discovery, reflection, and evidence-based methods to research effective teaching and student learning. For all schools, SoTL preparation facilitates the organized application of innovative teaching methods and subsequent data gathering for analysis and dissemination to determine effectiveness. For comprehensive schools, SoTL aligns well with missions typical for this type of institution, thereby will most likely be valued and rewarded as a form of scholarship. For small schools, SoTL is an essential component of a successful instructor and will be highly valued in the process of promotion and tenure. The challenges for all schools include the amount of time this type of research requires and the perceived lack of institutional value as compared to discipline specific research. For mid-size institutions, SoTL is commonly misunderstood and therefore, may not be valued, rewarded or recognized in tenure and promotion. This was found to be discipline specific. SoTL is useful to faculty as research opportunities as it is quantifiable and rigorous; to increase awareness on teaching and learning; and for evidence of effective teaching for tenure and promotion. Types of SoTL include pre/post-assessment, essays developing innovative methods, summaries of self-reflection, integration of larger frameworks within curriculum, qualitative studies, and meta-analyses. Topics can include active learning, assessment (rubrics), cooperative learning, general education, undergraduate research, and technology.

Promotion and Tenure Events

These events are very popular for everyone and are critical for development, growth and institutional stability. The events are essential for connecting decision-makers with stakeholders. The challenges include an innate aspect of human concern of the unknown, and a potential traditional fear of “publish or perish”. Also, there is a universal uncertainty of potentially moving guidelines to secure promotion and tenure.

Active Learning Methodology

In every institution, active learning connects theoretical to applied learning and capitalizes on the efficiency of an information processing model. For large schools, undergraduate research and project based learning implemented as active learning components were examples of faculty engaging students early in a potential career in scholarship. Mid-sized schools integrate active techniques with project-based research to enable students to participate in a holistic discovery of knowledge and understanding in the application process. Smaller schools provide engaging, contextual learning environments and activities which attend to student-centric philosophy. The challenges for all include the time required and the ability to change teaching style. For large schools, often, faculty members have learned one type of pedagogy as a doctoral candidate and do not currently have the time or motivation to update their approach. At all schools, frequently faculty members are aware of effective teaching practices, but there may be a perception that changing strategies could reduce student course evaluation scores.

Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs)

For all institutions, events assisting GTAs were designed to prepare them for future careers in higher education. In research institutes, these events are essential for students whose goals are to work in a research environment and to assist in developing and

understanding their teaching philosophy. In a comprehensive institution, this is a critical time in a students' career to assist in understanding how research and teaching are closely aligned and can work in concert. The challenges for all include training, acculturation, mentoring and breaking the cycle. Comprehensives frequently only have a few GTAs and may wish to focus their roles on administrative efforts. Small schools may not have a significant role since many smaller private institutions do not employ GTAs.

Teaching and Learning Library

Every institution can provide specific teaching-centered resources that offer unique, specific literature for teaching, learning, and scholarship. Large schools can offer dedicated, resources to assist faculty who may not have precious exposure to teaching methods and provide a space for discussion of teaching strategies and support. For comprehensives, this provides an ideal place for faculty to frequently visit to keep current, share ideas and collaborate with colleagues. The challenges for everyone include finding the funds and identifying the market and usability of these resources. For comprehensive schools, it may be a challenge to provide the specific type of resources which they can efficiently read and implement. For small schools, many of the faculty may be on the leading edge pushing the envelope on teaching and learning, hence the best practices may not be sufficient or current.

Instructional Technology (IT)

This issue has become more and more significant for each type of institution. IT may provide unique possibilities to enhance various learning styles and access some students in their own learning environments. For large schools, IT can increase efficiency, and provide a dynamic and interactive method for distribution of research models online for teaching, research, review and input. Comprehensive schools can create an ideal environment to explore for aligning teaching and learning styles, offering multiple modes of learning and investigating

research in the area of educational technologies. For small schools, IT enables student-centered teaching to go beyond the classroom into asynchronous communication and interaction as well as offering mobile and social learning. The challenge for all includes the need to embrace change, identifying the funds, ensuring appropriate maintenance and training, as well as encouraging a positive attitude and aptitude for technology use. In addition, all schools struggle with finding the time to learn successful methods for integrating technology into their teaching as well as identifying a systematic, sustainable way to institutionalize the Instructional Technology.

Non-academic events

These types of events can build collegiality, collaboration, and provide a venue for faculty to more fully enjoy their academic life. In addition they provide a broad arena for discussions between disciplines, which enables integration of content for general education, seminars, etc. The challenge for everyone is determining if the time invested is worthy and valued. Some schools may see the benefits and participate, but also, may not be able to fully connect and capitalize on these experiences to successfully integrate into their teaching and research.

Connecting Thoughts and Conclusions

The concept of tailoring faculty development needs to one's institution, typically through an ongoing faculty needs assessment, is commonplace in most centers. The struggle is to assess the effectiveness of the interventions and opportunities to influence changing faculty activity in the classroom setting. However, the intention of this paper was to gather baseline development practices and share the strengths and challenges of each in hopes of assisting in cross-over possibilities from one institutional type to another, as well as highlight awareness of the different approaches. In addition, this compilation can act as a guide to assist or confirm the

types of programs which centers provide, and may help them be proactive as they develop similar programs to maximize the potential for success. The authors encourage those in the Faculty Development profession to become part of state, regional and national level organizations to meet those at similar and different institutions and share ideas on effective strategies. Bring speakers in that have expertise in the areas in which the institution would like to develop and adapt materials for faculty and institutional use. Overall, using the information in this paper to develop a way to configure and assess faculty development in a systematic, measurable - formative and summative - process that addresses the university mission is encouraged.

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