

Faculty Engagement and Development: Effective and Innovative Practice

A Report on the ELI 2014 Spring Focus Session

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Abstract

On April 1, 2, and 3, 2014, the teaching and learning community gathered for the 2014 ELI Spring Focus Session, an online event that explored the ways in which faculty development is evolving to meet the needs of today's learning environments, which increasingly mix online and face-to-face learning. This report provides a synthesis of the key ideas, themes, and concepts that emerged. Focus session materials, recordings, and resources are available online.

More than any other core mission in higher education, teaching and learning is the locus of change, innovation, and strategic reimagining at the institutional level. As new teaching and learning options proliferate, faculty engagement and development is of fundamental importance to institutional success. Faculty development improves practice and manages change by enhancing individual strengths and abilities, as well as organizational capacities and culture. How is the teaching and learning community rethinking its approach to this task? What innovations are we seeing in faculty engagement and development, given higher education's reexamination of its teaching and learning mission? The ELI sought to answer these questions with its 2014 Spring Focus Session on faculty engagement and development.

One common theme from the focus session was that faculty development has entered a new era, one in which a growing number of such programs are asked to clearly evaluate their effectiveness and their results. Where reports about faculty development formerly focused largely on the number of sessions conducted and the number of instructors who participated, programs today are increasingly tied to specific, measurable goals as well as to key institutional initiatives and priorities. As Laura Winer of McGill University said in her presentation, the question has changed from "What do you do?" to "What difference do you make?"

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Another prominent thread of the focus session concerned the interplay of teaching in online or hybrid modes and teaching in traditional face-to-face venues. In many cases, changes in faculty development programs are driven by a need to help faculty understand how to teach effectively in fully or partially online courses, and that understanding can be equally beneficial to face-to-face teaching.

Personalized Faculty Development

Just as students arrive at college with differing levels of readiness, instructors don't all have the same aptitudes or prior experiences teaching (or teaching online). Many institutions have established training programs for online faculty, sometimes making such programs mandatory, and a growing recognition that one size does *not* fit all has led some institutions to begin evaluating faculty readiness to teach in online or hybrid settings.

Thomas Cavanagh talked about one such effort at the University of Central Florida. UCF had previously developed a flagship, 10-week course for online instruction, but as more new faculty arrived with experience teaching online, the university implemented the Online Faculty Readiness Assessment (OFRA). The tool is an online, evidence-based instrument built on a range of criteria, including previous teaching online experience, understanding of particular technologies, and course design strategies. The results can exempt an instructor from the entire 10-week course or from selected parts of it.

Reta Chaffee described something similar at Granite State College, which, like many institutions, has seen its share of online courses and enrollments grow considerably over the past few years. Granite State moved its faculty development away from a standard four-week course to a layered system of self-paced tutorials, customized modules, and close interaction with mentors and instructional designers. The program identifies faculty competencies and gaps, assessing prior experience and needs, similar to competency-based programs for students.

Targeted Programs

Assess Individual Faculty

Tailor the Tools

Include TAs

Edward Watson spoke about an initiative at the University of Georgia that focuses on teaching assistants. Recognizing that TAs tend to need different kinds of development from other faculty and instructors, the university established a program built on existing TA requirements, with a set of additional programs including resources specific to the University of Georgia, a teaching awards program, a unit on the scholarship of teaching and learning, and others.

Approaches to Assessment

Holding faculty development to explicit standards is new territory for many colleges and universities. As Tanya Joosten of the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee reminded participants, the first step in any evaluation is defining success and determining how it will be measured. Along with several other presenters, she pointed to backward design as an effective strategy for faculty development—starting with the goals and then building a pedagogical model well suited to achieving those goals. Sue Hines provided a deep look into a program at Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota to evaluate faculty development. Their comprehensive approach identifies the learning objectives and takes a four-phased curricular approach to closely align the evaluation methods with those objectives.

Course or curriculum redesign is the starting point for some of the initiatives discussed at the focus session, and many faculty development programs address the transition from face-to-face teaching to either online or hybrid models. Donalee Attardo described a program at Purdue University to help faculty redesign courses to move away from a lecture model to active learning. Jill Leafstedt spoke about the Blended Learning Preparation Program at CSU Channel Islands, which is similarly designed to help faculty move to a learner-focused approach. The results included many changes to the way courses are structured and taught.

Penn State University combined elements of four evaluation programs to develop the Quality Transformation Faculty Development Assessment Framework, which provides a sophisticated, systematic approach to evaluating faculty development. Larry Ragan shared the highlights of the framework, including the metrics, and reiterated the importance of aligning goals and assessment strategies. He also called attention to the importance of using a variety of measurements to paint a fuller picture of faculty development.

An important part of faculty development can be feedback from students, and Edward Watson also spoke about a program at the University of Georgia that provides direct student feedback to instructors midway through the semester. Rather than waiting until the end of a course, the Mid-Semester Formative Evaluations program surveys students and shows faculty what they can do immediately to improve the course. Not only has it been well received by students and faculty, it also often launches a series of future activities by instructors to improve their teaching.

Evaluation

Define Success

Align Goals with Methods

Identify the Starting Point

Include Student Voices

Structuring and Conducting Faculty Development

Faculty development can be organized and managed in as many different ways as there are programs. Some institutions pursue a highly centralized structure, such as the Open SUNY program that Alexandra Pickett shared, whereas institutions such as Harper College have implemented a cross-functional approach, explained by Michael Bates, which coordinates the many “pockets” of faculty development that formerly operated in isolation. In these and many other examples presented

at the focus session, clear frameworks were developed to guide and structure faculty development, and the value of these frameworks was evident.

California State University created a Digital Ambassadors Program, in which members of the faculty champion the use of educational technologies among other instructors. As Gerry Hanley and Jessica Parker explained, the ambassadors are compensated and have various responsibilities, including innovating instructional practices and sharing those practices.

The program identified three challenges facing faculty development—ignorance, fear, and isolation—and addressed them by connecting faculty to colleagues who can support their instructional transformations, to peers who are leaders in using technology, and to connections within a network of other faculty working through the same issues.

Learning technology—and effectively using it to support instruction—is often the impetus behind faculty development, and in many cases, technology tools are also part of *how* faculty development is conducted. Aimee Hague and Katie Vale described how Harvard University uses a CRM tool to coordinate support for faculty development among a group of disparate units on campus, including academic technology, the library, the writing center, the center for teaching, museums, and a center for geographic analysis.

The Center for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment at Azusa Pacific University uses two tools to support faculty development. Stephanie Juillerat and Michael Truong described how the faculty use the online tool Digital Measures to set professional goals and record and track activities toward them, generating strong engagement from among the faculty. The institution also uses its customer service tool Zendesk to allow faculty to use the same channel they use for technical help to seek pedagogical help.

Digital badges—a technology-enabled way of recognizing learning achievements—play a role in faculty development, including the program at Granite State College, which combines badges with a competency-based approach. Badges are central to the EduPass program at the University of Alaska Anchorage. Sarah Frick and Jeanette Renaudineau described how the program uses badges within the metaphor of a passport to engage faculty and encourage them to pursue a range of professional learning opportunities at the university. The self-paced program is coupled with various professional development activities including promotion and tenure, institutional recognition, and mentoring.

Sometimes specific technologies are the focus of faculty development programs. Most students use mobile devices on a daily basis, and faculty—who use them as well—are increasingly incorporating them into their teaching. Luke Bennett and Ryan Seilhamer described a mobile-specific faculty development course at the University of Central Florida. The modular course encourages faculty to look past the novelty of mobile devices and consider their true pedagogical value. In one case, a faculty member decided *not* to use mobile devices after taking the course.

In contrast to the technology-based programs, Erica Andree of Pacific University described an effort by the Northwest Academic Computing Consortium (NWACC) Instructional Technology Group to produce a deck of cards that address particular technology topics. The group meets annually, and the idea of creating a set of 24 cards was intended to sustain the engagement of the group over the course of the year. Each card covers a topic relevant to faculty development—such as social media, blended teaching, and flipped classrooms—and includes learning objectives, how-tos, and pitfalls. The cards should prove to be a valuable resource for faculty, and the exercise demonstrates how a

Models

Develop a Framework
Garner Faculty Support
Use the Technology
Target Specific Tools
Work across Boundaries

group of professionals from different institutions ranging from community colleges to large public universities can work together toward a common goal that enriches all of the individual participants.

Elements of Successful Programs

Over the course of the focus session, several issues came up repeatedly and should be taken into consideration in any faculty development effort. Some were cautionary—admonitions about principles to keep front and center, lest a well-intentioned faculty development effort fall flat because it is perceived to intrude on faculty authority or academic freedom. Other issues concerned logistics and the resources needed to launch, sustain, and evaluate an effective faculty development program.

Several presenters spoke explicitly about creating a faculty community of practice to support one another and share ideas and experiences. Whether through ambassadors, mentors, peer groups, or cohorts of faculty in a development program, intentional and structured communities of practice are a key part of many successful efforts. At the same time, enabling informal and fluid communities can also contribute to a supportive environment for faculty.

Some presentations raised concerns about trust and confidentiality. Faculty development programs that closely monitor goals and outcomes have the potential to feel bureaucratic and intrusive, and, as Edward Bowen of the Dallas County Community College District noted in his remarks, it's important that these programs build trust. Larry Ragan of Penn State expressed the issue well in his presentation when he said that the goal of faculty development is to help faculty, not to punish them.

For many programs, part of building trust is letting individual faculty guide the effort. To be sure, some institutions require certain training for faculty who teach online or blended courses. But in several of the programs, participation is entirely voluntary—interested faculty can initiate the process. Regardless of which model is pursued, many presenters spoke about how the programs empower faculty to take risks, innovate, and assume responsibility for their growth as educators.

Two interesting examples of faculty development at scale came from Southern New Hampshire University and SUNY. The online program at SNHU has grown by leaps and bounds, and the institution has added 1,600 new faculty in the past 12 months, most of them adjuncts; it expects to add another 2,000 in the next year. Bill Harlow described SNHU's three-week program focused on the culture, technology, and pedagogy of teaching online. Surveys of faculty regarding their preparedness to teach online courses suggest that quality faculty development can be delivered on a large scale. Similarly, the Center for Online Teaching Excellence at SUNY uses a four-part approach to develop faculty across the very broad range of institutions included in the SUNY system. According to Alexandra Pickett, the program—and the programs that preceded it—have trained more than 5,000 faculty and 200 instructional designers across the SUNY system.

Several presentations addressed issues surrounding support for faculty development programs, and the upshot was that support is not simple, cheap, or easy to deliver. The level of resources needed to support these programs is part of why evaluation of faculty development has become so important, and a successful program will need to keep track of the many people and systems that are involved. Several presenters reminded participants that effective faculty development is iterative and ongoing

Considerations

Foster Learning Communities

Cultivate Trust

Empower Faculty

Plan for Scale

Provide Support

Align Incentives and Rewards

and that technologies and educational models will continue to evolve, adding to the commitment needed to sustain these programs.

Another consideration many presentations touched on is the interplay of incentives, compensation, and benefits. Effectively tying faculty development to explicit goals and measurements calls for an examination of what draws faculty to such programs and what they expect to get out of them. Many programs compensate participants—with money, release time, or both. Some faculty development programs are mandatory for participation in connection with a strategic institutional initiative, while other programs are voluntary. Rewards can include certifications or badges, the opportunity to teach in online programs, and consideration in promotion and tenure decisions. No single combination is right for all institutions, but aligning the incentives with the effort required and the outcomes of faculty development is an important part of success.

Conclusion

Recently, new technologies, new educational models, and new kinds of programs and institutions have appeared, and these developments have transformed many student learning experiences. Faculty development programs have also evolved to support these changes. As the learning activities, courses, and programs of higher education increasingly leverage information technology, opportunities abound for faculty to innovate and experiment to learn how to teach effectively in new settings. Faculty development programs use new models and the tools of technology to increase instructor engagement and skill. Programs have become much more personalized and targeted, factoring in previous experience and particular needs for specific groups of faculty. Many institutions are building mechanisms to evaluate faculty development, setting explicit goals and designing both the programs and the assessment tools to align with desired outcomes. New models continue to emerge, and the future promises an expanding array of innovative and engaging faculty development programs.

Sessions and Speakers

Resources from the focus session, including slides and other session materials, as well as recordings of the presentations, can be accessed from <http://www.educause.edu/eli/events/eli-spring-focus-session/online-recordings>.

- **Erica Andree**, “Collaborative Creation of an Instructional Technology Deck: A Proof of Concept from the NWACC Instructional Technology Group”
- **Donalee Attardo**, “IMPACT: Customized Faculty Development for Learner-Centered Course Redesign”
- **Michael Bates**, “A Team Approach to Faculty Development: Integrating Full-Time and Adjunct Faculty Development Efforts”
- **Luke Bennett and Ryan Seilhamer**, “Mobile Essentials for Faculty”
- **Edward C. Bowen**, “It’s a Wrap! Or is It?”
- **Thomas Cavanagh**, “Assessing an Instructor’s Prior Online Experience”
- **Reta Chaffee**, “When One Size No Longer Fits All: Preparing a Diverse Faculty for the Ever-Changing Online Environment”
- **Jennie Ferris and Laura R. Winer**, “A Multilevel Approach to Faculty Development”

- **Sarah Frick and Jeanette Renaudineau**, “EduPass: A Digital Badge Journey to Professional Learning at UA”
- **Aimee Hague and Katie L. Vale**, “Supporting Faculty Development through Collaborative Teamwork and a CRM Tool”
- **Gerard L. Hanley and Jessica Parker**, “California State University Digital Ambassadors Program: Empowering Leadership and Innovation in Academic Technologies and Faculty Development”
- **Bill Harlow**, “New Faculty Training at Scale”
- **Sue Hines**, “How to Evaluate Faculty Development”
- **Tanya Joosten**, “Ensuring Quality and Determining Effectiveness”
- **Stephanie Juillerat and Michael Truong**, “Measuring What We Value: Tools That Capture Faculty Engagement and Development”
- **Jill Leafstedt**, “A Blended Journey in Faculty Development”
- **Alexandra M. Pickett**, “Online Faculty Development at Scale: The Open SUNY Center for Online Teaching Excellence”
- **Lawrence C. Ragan**, “The Quality Transformation Faculty Development Assessment Framework”
- **C. Edward Watson**, “A Systematic Method for Improving Instruction through Student Feedback” and “Comprehensive GTA Pedagogical Development: Preparing Graduate Students for Teaching Success”