



Creating Quality Faculty Development Programs to Impact Teaching and Learning

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Introduction

Faced with the twin challenges of changing demographics and increasing demands for greater accountability and transparency, institutions of higher education are grappling with how best to meet the needs of a changing student body and how best to create a shared vision for faculty, administrators, and institutions. In a climate in which faculty accountability is ever more dependent on research and scholarship, especially as rewarded by promotion and tenure, improvement in the quality of teaching is an increasing concern. The central question, however, remains: are higher education institutions poised to address these concerns effectively?

A number of issues are challenging the landscape of faculty work in higher education, including retirement, attrition rates, and inadequate graduate preparation for teaching, among others. No longer is it business as usual; we cannot continue teaching the same way we have been—in a traditional fashion. Today's students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach. They have changed radically, and we must create an environment to impact the twenty-first-century learner. Known as *millennials*, these students are making up the fabric of our courses as we go into the twenty-first century using diverse strategies. We must address the challenges that millennial students—older, younger, traditional, and nontraditional, well prepared and underprepared—and their teachers face in participating in a college learning environment. It is imperative that we provide a space for ongoing dialogue to discuss how best to reach and teach those whom we have a commitment to serve. We can begin such dialogue by creating quality faculty development programs and changing the culture of teaching.

Significance of Faculty Development

As Bodily (2008) emphasizes, faculty are the heart and soul of a university—its key lifeline both to providing valuable skills and to promoting intellectual stimulation. Several studies have shown that faculty-student interaction leads to increased positive cognitive and affective development, increased persistence in college, and an overall positive college experience (Astin 1993; Pascarella and Terenzini 1991). These authors note that interpersonal interaction with faculty enhances a wide variety of student outcomes and is one of the most influential sources of undergraduate student learning.

The concept of faculty development has long been an integral part of higher education's strategy for gaining new knowledge, self-renewal, and increased vitality. Starting first with the concern for the advancement of subject matter competence and mastery of one's own teaching, faculty development was seen as being within the jurisdiction of faculty programs, becoming "marginal to what [was] really important on many college campuses" (McMillen 1987, 15). Schuster et al. (1990) emphasize that to be truly effective, faculty development programs must integrate all aspects of development: personal, professional, and organizational. Braskamp, Trautvetter, and Ward (2006) further elaborate on the holistic development of students



in higher education. Hageseth and Atkins (1988, as cited in Hubbard and Atkins 1995, 120) propose to further expand the boundaries of faculty development to include “faculty wellness and institutional quality of life, and opportunities for personal growth and career renewal.”

Higher education institutions are now recognizing that the needs of all faculty—early, mid-career and veteran faculty—must be met, at the very least, to indirectly impact student learning. Sorcinelli, Austin, Eddy, and Beach (2006) assert that with the dynamic complexity now characterizing higher education, the more successful institutions will be those that make faculty development a key strategic resource. Indeed, recently designed faculty development programs are intended to initiate, infuse, and sustain change in targeted faculty, and, furthermore, as highlighted by Camblin and Steger (2000), better enable the faculty and the institution to create an enriched environment that addresses the increasing complexities of higher education. It is essential to provide evidence-based learning and assess our programs.

Table 1. Selected Findings from Needs Assessment Survey 2008

Participants were asked to rank their interest in a list of teaching goals in order of the goal's importance to their professional development. The scale used was 1 = Most Important to You and 6 = Least Important to You.

The most important goal for survey participants was

Maintaining in-depth knowledge and expertise in my field of specialization (59.4 percent)

The least important goal was

Developing my “grantmanship” skills for teaching and curriculum (28.3 percent)

Participants were asked to rank each goal in a list of research/creative activities in order of its importance to their professional development. The scale used was 1 = Most Important to You and 6 = Least Important to You

The most important goal for survey participants was

Increasing my level of productivity in research/creative activity (39.6 percent)

The least important goal was

Renewing my enthusiasm for engaging in research/creative activity (39.6 percent)

Assessing Quality Faculty Development Programming

Bland (1998) believes that effective faculty development programs have two main foci: a widespread commitment to meeting the needs of faculty and a systematic and rigorous attention to building good programming. More specifically, Cafarelli (n.d.) suggests thirteen characteristics of effective faculty development: emphasis on institutional goals, broad faculty ownership and participation, strong administrative support, collaboration with other campus constituents, collaboration with other institutions, contribution to the overall dialogue on scholarly teaching and learning and faculty development, goal-oriented and sustainable programming, provision of support and rewards for faculty, knowledgeable leadership, and effective use of evaluation and feedback, among others. To this end, creating quality faculty development programs should be integrated into an institution's fabric and culture.

While proliferation of teaching centers has sought to address the increasingly complex challenges of teaching in higher education through faculty development programs, and a scholarship of faculty development has begun to flourish (Eggins and Macdonald 2003; Elvidge 2004), little research has looked at the impact of these programs. Eastern Illinois University created a needs assessment survey to further evaluate its programs and the delivery of such programs.



Needs Assessment Survey

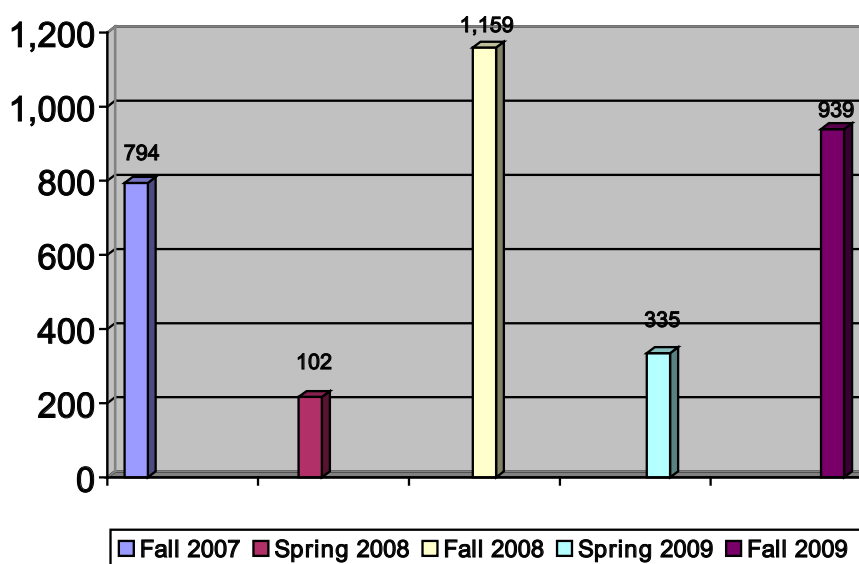
Needs assessment surveys, with the last one conducted in spring 2008, gathered faculty input to help define the professional development and programming needs of the faculty in teaching, research, and service at Eastern Illinois University. A questionnaire was developed to collect data related to goals for teaching, research/creative activities, and service/other activities; topics for potential faculty development opportunities; and suggestions for improvement; and speakers. Table 1 (previous page) summarizes some of the findings from the 2008 needs assessment survey.

Wholesome Professor Teaching and Learning Workshop Series

Faculty development provides workshops throughout the year to augment faculty teaching. Scholarly Teaching and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning are highly encouraged, especially as many sub-fields have sprung up in higher education and have become increasingly sophisticated. Drawing upon leading topics in higher education, these workshops are intended to assist faculty in thriving in many facets of their life, including topics to enhance quality of life in the ivory towers.

In the past six years, 153 Wholesome Professor workshops have been presented, with more than one thousand participants and attendees. In 2009–2010, the theme of faculty development is An Inclusive Campus: Preparing Faculty, Staff, and Students for a Diverse and Global World. Some workshops were specifically targeted towards student populations, including Increasing Student Motivation and Engagement and The Thesis and the Graduate Student. Other workshop titles include Thinking Critically and Writing Well and Maximizing the Potential of Millennial Learners. Figure 1 displays attendance at all faculty development events since fall 2007.

Figure 1. Attendance at All Faculty Development Events



Note: Fall semester is typically heavily scheduled, as we have New Faculty Orientation Institute, New Faculty Reception, and Faculty Appreciation Day.

Mid-Point Faculty Evaluation

In the 2009-2010 academic year, a midpoint evaluation will be used, for both new faculty and mid-career faculty, to assess pedagogy. These models were adapted by Sorcinelli (2009) to create a form of assessment that deals with pedagogical changes, made to enhance learning and teaching, moving us beyond assessment of participation. Table 2 (following page) illustrates these questions.



Discussion and Conclusion

Findings from this study suggest positive changes in approaches to teaching through faculty development practices at Eastern Illinois University. Evaluation of the effectiveness of any faculty development program is crucial both to assess existing programs and to provide valid recommendations for designing future programs that better address the needs of individual faculty members and the institution. Although evaluation can be a complex and challenging process, we cannot afford to ignore the need because of its importance for the growth and sustainability of our programming.

At a time when teaching in higher education has come under increased pressures for accountability and improvement (Wilson 2002), research evidence supporting the efficacy of faculty development programs is increasingly important. These results demonstrate that faculty development can be a powerful tool in initiating and setting the direction for curricular change to meet the needs of faculty in their multiple roles as teachers and scholars.

Table 2. Questions from Midpoint Evaluation

Do you recall learning something over the past five years from Faculty Development workshops that has enhanced your teaching practices?
Have you changed your teaching in any way?
Did the changes have evidence of a positive effect on teaching?
Did these have a positive impact in ways such as: teaching strategies, students' attitude, and student evaluations?

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