

The benefits of a new faculty seminar at a career-focused educational institution:
Building a community of learners

By

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Effective faculty development activities typically elude many directors of education, deans, and faculty developers. The standard workshop, with luncheon served, and led by a presenter outsourced by a book publisher, addresses topics like classroom management and learning styles. After lunch, having attended a series of presentations, faculty completes a survey rating their satisfaction with the workshop. At the end of the day, it is the hope of directors, deans, and faculty developers that from this workshop faculty take away an idea or two to implement in their classroom. To this point, a segment of faculty, perhaps overlooked, needing training at a workshop or seminar is new faculty, often coming from a technical or business environment needing to transition into the classroom. Specifically, a career educational institution should focus on training its new faculty population prior to faculty entering the classroom.

The new faculty seminar program began in January 2008 after two deans from the same campus observed several new faculty experiencing difficulties in their classroom with management, instructional methods, and student learning, such as student not being on task or not following directions. The deans approached the Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning to find a solution to these faculty concerns. The director recommended creating and hosting a proactive eight-hour faculty seminar to prepare new faculty, many of whom have had no teaching experience or have had limited experience in the classroom .

The seminar especially targeted new faculty who arrived from the clinical field such as allied health services or from the business community. The director focused on a seminar approach rather than a workshop approach because a seminar suggests a collaborative, dialogue-based way of sharing knowledge about teaching and learning practices. The director held focus groups and researched those topics new faculty particularly wished to explore as they transitioned from the clinic or business setting to the classroom. In addition, the director developed a manual detailing an interactive curriculum to teach new faculty institutional culture and effective teaching and learning methodologies, such as first day practices, active instructional techniques, classroom pacing, collaborative and cooperative learning, and question development. The director taught these concepts through demonstration, modeling and reflection. During the seminar, the director showed the new faculty how to implement these methods and allowed them to reflect upon these methods in order for the new faculty to adopt these methods into their classroom.

The seminar prepared over 214 new faculty since January 2008. The director measured the success of the seminar by examining several data points, beyond the 97% satisfaction level. The institution measures effective teaching on quantifiable data that include completion rates, level of student satisfaction of instruction, attendance rates, and classroom pre-and post-test scores. If an instructor's score on these four data points averages 90% or higher, that instructor qualifies for the institution's "Instructor of Distinction" award. The director used these data points to identify the benefit of this seminar on faculty preparation. The director used 2006 teaching effectiveness data and human resource data to indicate the number of new faculty who achieved the 90%

benchmark prior to the implementation of the seminar. Only six new faculty obtained that benchmark. Forty-eight new faculty, all of whom attended the seminar, obtained the 90% benchmark between 2008 and 2009 (Note: Only January-May 2009 data is used). In addition, the director measured faculty retention rates since low faculty retention could increase faculty turnover, which in turn could undermine faculty effectiveness in the classroom and lead to institutional demoralization. The institution retained 67% of new faculty in 2006; however, in 2008 retention increased to 85%, and in 2009, to 89%.

However, some words of caution apply. First, the instruction of this eight-hour seminar presents the largest and most important variable. The director found that a demonstration, modeling, and reflecting approach used to instruct faculty during the seminar helps promote teaching-for-transference because the faculty engage in tangible and practical activities that they can reflect upon as to how they will use teaching methods in the classroom. Second, a meta-cognitive or reflective approach to faculty learning also works well with students.

In short, the data collected from the institution regarding the effectiveness of the seminar provide evidence that improved teaching and learning knowledge creates better-prepared new faculty who can enhance their student learning, a task that has typically eluded faculty developers. Moreover, starting with new faculty, more seasoned faculty may realize the benefits of participating in a seminar to enhance their own classroom teaching techniques and motivate student learning. Thus, hosting a new faculty seminar in a career-based institution does show quantitative and qualitative benefits, such as survey data, this data indicated that 97% of new faculty found the seminar useful to prepare them in their new roles. In addition, over 95% of faculty found using methods

such as graphic organizers, pacing methods, first day procedures, classroom management methods and meta-cognitive techniques to be relevant. Campus observations also confirmed that new faculty have used many of these concepts. Most important, faculty conversations describing the importance of how student learn increased between those faculty who attended the seminar and the Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning.

In essence, developing a community of learning for new faculty reflects the ancillary benefit of extending the community of learning to all faculty. Thus, the solution to the effective faculty development problem described at the beginning of this brief essay begins with teaching new faculty to care about how students learn. New faculty will spread the word about effective methods they learned, adopted, modified, and championed. The director's next phase of building a community of learners requires teaching students directly how to learn and to teach all faculty how to reinforce these better study habits in their classroom. Please take a moment and reflect on how a new faculty seminar could help both your faculty and your student populations.