10-30-2017

Institutional Investment in Teaching Excellence

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Recommended Citation

INSTITUTIONAL INVESTMENT IN TEACHING EXCELLENCE

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The concepts and ideas framed in this paper have been developed and structured based on the collaborative efforts of individuals working in the field of faculty development, often struggling to find an institutional home for over half a century. The authors presented the evolution of the field of faculty development and the important role faculty developers play in improving instructors’ teaching practice. Further, the authors examine promising practices to assess faculty development impacts and outcomes, and finally, offer future goals and actions.
Institutional Commitment to Teaching Excellence
toward which the profession might aspire. The ideas put forth are based on solid evidence, and represent the thoughts of a group of internationally recognized leaders in faculty development on behalf of center directors across the country who, in many cases, have for too long worked as individual entities within the institution.

If faculty development is to progress (which evidence suggests will improve higher education through enhanced student learning), then there must be a strong and persistent institutional commitment to this field. Offices of faculty development should be held in the same esteem as any other entity sitting at executive council meetings. Such offices should also face the same expectations, with annual reports including solid assessment data, and contributions to campus-wide strategic planning.

To accomplish this requires a standardization of the field of faculty development, with a better understanding of possible practices and expected outcomes, with base-funded efforts and directors whose positions are well respected on campus, and a firm understanding of how improved teaching and learning through faculty development efforts impacts the institution’s efficiency.

ENHANCING THE CENTRALITY OF TEACHING EXCELLENCE

Culture, practice, student outcomes, and institutional finances are increasingly bound together (Brown and Kurzweil 2017). Colleges must demonstrate to accreditors, parents, and market forces that they are “student ready” (McNair et al. 2016) if they want to survive, with an emphasis on creating effective learning environments in and outside of the classroom, the latter often tied to institutional performance (Felten et al. 2016; Institute for Higher Education Policy 2012). Schroeder and associates (2010) note that issues confronting higher education will interface with some element of teaching and learning in the classroom. From this, we would infer that professional teaching practice is highly valued on college and university campuses. Teaching is a deep and complex form of communication. In fact, teaching achievement is undervalued on many American campuses (Bowen and McPherson 2016; Fairweather 2002; Kezar and Maxey 2016; Wilson 2010).

While faculty participation in the ongoing improvement of teaching is essential to the mission of colleges and universities, the value of teaching to the institution is especially reflected in the lack of support it gives this (generally) silent majority of teachers: non-tenure track, or contingent, instructors. However, investing in instructional quality is increasingly becoming an institutional imperative. This is especially the case for institutions in states that have moved toward a performance-based funding model for public institutions, such as the State of Florida, where demonstrating improved student outcomes directly impacts the institution’s overall net revenue (Taylor 2017a).

As indicated in Chapter 4, Goal 3, institutions must do a much better job of building the teaching capacity of contingent faculty, who now make up half of college instructors nationwide (American Association of University Professors 2017; Austin 2002; Bowen and McPherson 2016)—a number expected to increase each year for the foreseeable future (Taylor 2017b). Non-tenure track (NTT) faculty should not be required to participate in professional development without consideration of fair compensation. Doctorate-granting universities can also demonstrate that their graduates (many of whom are bound for public comprehensive, land-
grant, urban serving or minority serving institutions), know how to teach (see Chapter 4, Goal 1). As discussed in Chapter 4, many excellent teaching programs offered at doctorate-granting institutions are largely voluntary. Future faculty may receive little formal teacher training (as opposed to TA work) as part of their postgraduate studies. This makes little sense for thousands of doctoral students headed to careers at the majority of U.S. community colleges and universities—comprehensive teaching institutions.

Professional development in higher education also differs markedly from that in other fields—for example, medicine, with its emphasis on continuous improvement (see Chapter 4). Systemic approaches to professional development in other fields often contrast to the historically individualistic views of faculty in their role vis-à-vis undergraduate success, where the locus of control remains behind the closed doors of the classroom and teaching is a fixed enterprise. Of the two major responsibilities of faculty, teaching and research, faculty are more likely to identify as scholars than as teachers (Damrosch 1994; Fairweather 1996, 2002; Hattie and Marsh 1996). Meanwhile, faculty interest in teaching and their students’ outcomes matters deeply—this relationship drives profound learning and structurally explains much of the relationship between, for example, organized instruction and first-year GPA (Roksa, Trolian, Blaich, and Wise 2016).

Although teaching centers are increasingly connected to student learning, many still operate at the margins of academic affairs. As a consequence, institutions may allocate fewer resources for professional development staffing. Fundraising by development directors (many of whom were and are part time) and institutional expectations combine to undermine the capacity, scholarship, and potential influence of working with faculty to improve teaching and learning. Expectations for some centers are low, and some campuses have leveraged neither their goodwill nor their expertise. Faculty development, while understood as having a meaningful impact, has often gone unfunded or underfunded.

Have we fully embraced teaching in our profession? Faculty embrace what they are rewarded for. Institutions can help by creating conditions where faculty can dedicate more time, attention, and energy to meeting their current students where they are—to making higher education the engine of mobility it has promised to be. This is the question each college and university must answer honestly given mission and constituencies.

ACHIEVING INSTITUTIONAL EFFICIENCY THROUGH INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENTS

More and more, teaching and learning centers are being brought into the crux of strategies to improve institutions generally, examples are decreasing DFW (drop, fail, withdraw) rates, access for disadvantaged groups, and better uses of campus resources such as learning management systems (Kelley, Cruz, and Fire 2017). Increases in instructional expenditures have been shown to be positively correlated with student outcomes such as increased retention and degree completion.

Institutions can and should provide resources to help faculty developers and the faculty they serve better employ active learning strategies (such as cooperative learning and inquiry-based learning), as well as improving instructional organization, and better alignment of assessments with course objectives, all positively impacting mastery, course grades, and completion.
These results were found to be especially true for first-year students, remedial courses, and underserved and at-risk student populations (Brown and Kurzweil 2017, 8–10). The authors’ review of the literature shared this compelling finding:

The more a faculty member participated in development programs, the more her teaching and the outcomes of her students improved. Moreover, faculty participation in development had long-term impacts on student learning; students of participating faculty continued to demonstrate increased learning over time (11).

At the University of Central Florida, a campus that has grown 150 percent over the past decade, Brown and Kurzweil found intentional and consistent faculty development programming designed to increase instructional quality and capacity was integral to campus efforts to scale (16).

While quality instruction directly impacts student learning, it also impacts student motivation, pass rates, and interest in a subject, all of which link to decreased time to degree and course retakes. Instructional quality has also been found to be positively associated with student retention, which often leads to increased net revenue by avoiding gaps and inefficiencies. For example, recruiting a new student can cost three to five times what it costs to provide services for an already enrolled student. One student remaining for four years generates the same amount of revenue as four new students who leave after one year (Brown and Kurzweil, 6).

Improving instructional quality, and faculty development generally, does not happen in a vacuum. Fostering quality instruction is a key component of a quality department. Wergin’s work describes a commitment to excellence in teaching, student learning, and scholarship as a central pillar to a quality department. He goes on to state that motivation to do quality work is found when four key factors are present: autonomy, community, recognition, and efficacy (2003). Solid faculty development programming fosters these four domains in service of improving instructional quality. These factors can also directly impact retention of faculty, another high-impact cost to institutions. Replacing a faculty member is estimated to cost as much as 5 percent of a department’s operating budget (Bachrach 2005). Funding for faculty development is, therefore, a measure of institutional commitment not only to the development of faculty and student outcomes but ultimately to the mission, and bottom line, of the institution. With this in mind, what measures should be used as possible standards to demonstrate an institutional commitment to faculty development?

While differing institutional contexts and missions will require different prioritization, generally speaking, an effective faculty development program will do the following (Shahid 2013):

- Get the support of senior administrators for faculty development programs.
- Determine and provide/solicit the necessary human and financial resources for the program.
- Identify relevant leadership.
- Focus on realistic outcomes through training and workshops.
- Focus on consistent themes for some years.
- Set benchmarks for faculty learning.
- Use assessment to demonstrate impact.
Teaching and learning initiatives are typically scattered across the institution, the purview of many people and processes. “Student success” projects are variously housed in colleges, within grants projects (e.g., education grants), in program review committees, in centers of teaching and learning, and within student affairs units, among others. These initiatives are almost always associated with accreditation visits. Such individual projects and practices may be highly successful, but are typically unlinked or unknown to each other, and therefore arguably less effective at driving institutional change. For example, highly influential processes one step away from the curriculum, such as program review, are often unconnected to faculty development work, which might capably assist improvement of curricula (see Chapter 4).

One solution is to share leadership in this critical area, moving instructional effectiveness to the top of the institution’s agenda. Holcombe and Kezar (2017) argue that emerging institutional imperatives require new forms of campus leadership. Shared leadership would create a linking infrastructure where multiple people and perspectives drive decision making, including both faculty and administrators, around this issue. Shared leadership, unlike shared governance, designates a funded and unified approach to instructional effectiveness as a central endeavor. It is the contention of this paper that, given broad and complex shifts in higher education, existing approaches to teaching effectiveness as it drives student success are largely episodic and thus ineffective to meet demands on both the professoriate and on teaching and learning centers outlined earlier. A shared approach between faculty developers and academic and institutional leaders would cluster teaching and learning initiatives to effect large-scale impacts.

There is a unique ecology to the role faculty development plays with regard to teaching quality and student success, one that complicates the effect that faculty development can have on changing campus teaching quality. This dynamic includes teaching culture, endowments for teaching, centers for teaching and learning, and institutional funding (see Figure 1 below, which frames this issue). Faculty developers have historically led from the middle as agents of change, advocating for instructional quality and responding to the needs of dual constituencies. Leading from the middle, however, disproportionately burdens teaching and learning centers, if not faculty. In Chapter 4, the authors push faculty developers to establish professional framework and competencies and to successfully assess programming for greater institutional gains. But faculty developers cannot do this important work alone. Increasing teaching quality requires a dedicated and funded commitment from the institution, including changing teaching endowments such as RTP, and by its leaders to signal the importance of investing in instructional quality, a recognition that teaching excellence is a strategic priority.

It is arguable that an entire university could be approached from a developmental perspective. Higher education cannot meet increasing challenges without linking processes that purport to affect the same outcomes. In tight budgetary times, it benefits higher education institutions to recognize that quality faculty development has a financial impact and benefit to institutional mission. Simply put, it helps keep the lights on.
Corporate social responsibility (CSR) involves the ethical relationship and transparency of a company with all its stakeholders (faculty, staff, students, community) as well as established goals that are compatible with the sustainable development of society, respecting diversity, and reducing social ills (Dahan and Senol 2012). While CSR has always been closely tied to the educational mission of higher education institutions, social responsibility is a way for institutions to adapt a more businesslike approach that enables them to contribute to the well-being of the communities they serve, still achieving their bottom line.

Making learning more accessible and motivating at every level of education is not only a matter of equity; it also has significant pragmatic value. The state of California alone will be short more than 1 million baccalaureates by 2030 if current trends continue, with far-reaching consequences for future tax rolls (Johnson, Cuellar Mejia, and Bohn 2015). Further, enhancing the educational achievements of all Americans is another way to strengthen productivity and innovation in the workforce: more diverse teams are simply more effective (Nelson...
Increasing educational attainment among adult and other nontraditional learners has far-reaching global and national economic implications (Friedman 2007). Degree attainment is connected to lifetime earnings (Bowen and McPherson 2016); statistics regarding the lower percentages of highly qualified low-income students who attain degrees versus highly or moderately qualified high- and middle-income students who do are dismal.

Currently, 80 percent of high school graduates attend college within eight years of graduation, and undergraduate enrollment is six times greater than it was 50 years ago (Attewell et al. 2007). With estimates of the number of nontraditional students exceeding 70 percent of the enrollment in many postsecondary institutions, as well as being the highest population of learners in adult basic education (Zafft et al. 2006), we have to ask: Can formal education provide greater access to historically underserved learners—and graduate them in a timely fashion?

One answer to this question is that merely providing access is not enough. A case in point is a study of Hispanics in the City University of New York (Leinbach and Bailey 2006), an institution that has historically played a critical role in the education of minority, immigrant, and otherwise marginalized New Yorkers. Leinbach and Bailey report significantly lower success rates for Hispanics, compared with other minority and other immigrant populations, despite their prevalence in the university’s population, and despite the fact that Hispanic students are represented in a proportion similar to that of Hispanics in the New York City population.

In 2013, just 14 percent of Hispanics, 15 percent of American Indian/Alaska Natives, 16 percent of Pacific Islanders, and 19 percent of black adults age 25 and older had earned a bachelor’s degree, compared with 32 percent of adults of two or more races, and 33 percent of white adults (Musu-Gillette et al. 2016). The disparities between ethnic groups are starker in STEM attainment rates (Crisp, Nora, and Taggart 2009; Eagan, Hurtado, and Chang 2010). Of all science and engineering bachelor's degrees awarded in the U.S. (2012), only 8 percent went to blacks and 10 percent to Hispanics (National Science Foundation 2015). Even associate degree attainment remains low, especially for ethnic and linguistic minority students: in 2008, 30 percent of blacks and 20 percent of Hispanics age 25 to 34 had attained an associate degree or higher, compared with 49 percent of whites and 71 percent of Asians (Lee and Ransom 2011, 9). Black men in community colleges had the lowest completion rate of all racial, ethnic, and gender groups; 68 percent had not graduated in six years (Harper 2006). By 2012, 49 percent of all black undergraduates and 56 percent of all Hispanic undergraduates were enrolled at community colleges (American Association of Community Colleges 2013), where few will transfer to a four-year college to complete their degrees (Gándara et al. 2012).

Low-income, first-generation, adult students, and those with disabilities strive for college with mixed results. Students with low socioeconomic status (SES) are half as likely to earn a bachelor’s or higher within eight years of high school completion than are students with middle SES (14 versus 29 percent)—in contrast to 60 percent of high-SES students who attained this level of education (Snyder, de Brey, and Dillow 2016). Adult learners, a rapidly growing population over the age of 25 (typically with extensive life experience and responsibilities), constitute roughly 47 percent of postsecondary students (Snyder and Dillow 2015). Few long-term college persistence studies focus on adult students; Attewell and his colleagues (2007) found that 28 percent of bachelor’s degree recipients earn their diploma more than six years after enrolling in college, with women, students of color, and low-income students disproportionately affected. Steady growth is predicted throughout the U.S. for non-white populations through 2030 (Urban Institute 2015).
These numbers warrant significant attention to culturally responsive teaching in the academy. Faculties tend to judge the promise of their students of color more harshly than they do their white counterparts (Bensimon 2007; Jacoby-Senghor, Sinclair, and Shelton 2016), while instructional quality remains a primary influence on student motivation and learning (Arum and Roksa 2010; Elliot and Dweck 2005; Deci et al. 1991; Jankowski 2017). To graduate this emerging student majority, colleges and universities must attend to instruction that supports educational attainment of students within and across cultural groups (Adams, Bell, and Griffin 2007; Kitayama and Markus 1994, Geertz 1973) by revisiting teaching development, including questioning basic assumptions about these learners, many of them deficit (Lundquist, Spalding, and Landrum 2002). Inclusion stands as the largest barrier to college attainment (Orfield, Marin, and Horn 2005).

While there are some well-researched teaching practices that promote inclusive and deep learning within and across cultural and linguistic groups, there are relatively few comprehensive models to guide a coherent approach to instructional design and reflection on college teaching—for example, the motivational framework for culturally responsive teaching (Ginsberg and Wlodkowski 2009). Also, research on accelerated and intensive learning indicates that these formats can reduce the amount of time to earn a degree or credential, strengthen student learning, and make a postsecondary education more accessible for working adults (Aslanian 2001; Wlodkowski 2003). This task is the purview of the academy at large, and cannot fall to teaching centers alone.

As argued in Chapter 4, Goal 2, to effectively “pull a thread” through faculty development, teaching practices, and student learning requires a foundational theory that aligns well-theorized conditions (standards) and practices (see Goal 2). The theory needs to be an intersection of multi-discipline research on adult and professional (faculty) learning that can be represented through a pragmatic and coherent framework. Such a framework will enable teaching centers to more consistently create, implement, and study faculty learning. Similarly, it will enable faculty to create, implement, and study course design, instructional plans, and individual strategies. As noted in Chapter 3, we are calling for researchable sets of andragogic practices grounded in a solid and theoretically consistent framework.

Regardless of the model, a shared language (standards) for improvement, multiple forms of instructional collaboration (before, during, and after instruction), external partnerships, ongoing analysis of quantitative and qualitative data to inform teaching practices, and signature practices that elevate the identities of teaching centers discussed earlier in this paper are both essential and feasible.

CONCLUSION

As the focus in higher education becomes increasingly concentrated on outcomes versus inputs, institutional leaders are increasingly paying attention to the impacts of inputs on outcomes. While a growing body of literature has emerged in recent decades around the effects of teaching quality on student outcomes, a changing professoriate, shifting student demographics, and advances in learning design and delivery are leading to a renewed interest in research on the connections between instruction, student outcomes, and institutional resources.

In this and earlier chapters, the authors present evidence that suggests an investment in instructional quality improves student retention, persistence, and success rates, all of which
may positively affect net revenue (Brown and Kurzweil 2017). Enhancing the quality of instruction is necessary to support students through an improved holistic higher education experience that enhances learning and improves student outcomes. To achieve better teaching requires institutions to prepare for a postsecondary landscape in which the importance of faculty development and preparedness goes beyond the traditional tenure-track or research model. This means institutions should support faculty of all types and at all levels—part time and full time, tenure- and non-tenure-track, and graduate teaching assistants—to achieve and maintain high levels of teaching effectiveness. Faculty developers are well-positioned to provide that support. Moreover, if adequately resourced, faculty developers are well-positioned to partner in the design, delivery, and assessment of campus-based change strategies to enhance teaching practice and strengthen student learning, all of which may positively impact student attrition, course repeats, and time to graduation.

Simply stated, investing in good teaching through evidence-based, assessment-driven faculty development efforts can be a major lever for achieving better student outcomes. In an environment where many institutions, particularly public institutions, are increasingly facing budgetary challenges and are pursuing systematic improvements to increase efficiency, improving student outcomes through enhancing teaching effectiveness can be good for the institution’s bottom line.

What Can Institutional Leaders Do Next?

- Fund faculty development centers proportional to campus mission, vision, and strategic direction.
- Advance effective instruction as a top agenda item for institutional leaders, sharing leadership in this area across the organization.
- Doctorate-granting institutions should work to create a national teaching corps (Bowen and McPherson 2016); require graduate students to participate in professional teaching programs to ensure best teaching practice.
- Promote a “continuous professional development” model of faculty development that encourages and rewards recursive practice.
- Provide faculty development to all faculty, including those with part-time or contingent appointments—now the majority on many campuses.
- Privilege teaching quality in hiring, retention, tenure, and promotion documents, or other endowments.
- Adapt or develop research-based theoretical frameworks that demonstrate the complex and multidimensional relationship between professional development and student learning, which will stimulate the development of empirically testable models.
- Effectively prepare faculty to teach new majority students (e.g., adult learners, students of color, and first-generation students).
  - Prioritize teaching the most underprepared students using inclusive practices.
  - Collaborate to create instructional approaches that are mindful and self-aware.
- Ensure that curriculum remains relevant and responsive to student and community needs and that it incorporates appropriate learning technologies.
RUTGERS UNIVERSITY–NEWARK: A STRATEGIC COMMITMENT TO TEACHING EXCELLENCE

Given the research about the barriers first-generation students and those from under-resourced communities and schools face in completing credentials and degrees, it is likely more student-centered, attainment-focused instructional approaches will have a disproportionately large and positive impact on students from underserved communities.

Rutgers University–Newark (NJ), one of the four institutions in the Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey system and the most diverse campus in the country, completed a strategic planning process in 2016 under the leadership of Chancellor Nancy Cantor. Rutgers–Newark is increasingly focused on institutional change to build on its legacy as a place of opportunity that emphasizes “curriculum, scholarship, initiatives, places and spaces for both intra-group solidarity and intercultural engagement.” Instruction and creative pedagogy are natural places to value and leverage diversity for the greatest impact on student success.

Citing research confirming that students’ success and instructional practices are directly correlated, Rutgers–Newark has made a commitment to enhancing professional development opportunities for faculty and staff, and fully supporting them across their overlapping roles as scholars, teachers, and mentors. Excellence in instruction, therefore, is an important part of Rutgers–Newark’s plan to drive stronger student outcomes and higher graduation rates. In fall 2016, the university launched the P3 Collaboratory for Pedagogy, Professional Development, and Publicly-Engaged Scholarship, a comprehensive faculty development center that supports the emerging and existing professoriate.

Rutgers–Newark is making pedagogical training a cornerstone initiative of the P3 Collaboratory and aims to scale faculty development efforts to prepare nearly three-quarters of its instructional faculty in evidence-based instruction. To accomplish this effort, Rutgers–Newark is deploying the Association of College and University Educators (ACUE) online Course in Effective Teaching Practices, which aims to provide faculty with pedagogical tools and techniques they can implement.
in the classroom. Faculty who complete the Course in Effective Teaching Practice earn a certificate in Effective College Instruction, which is co-endorsed by ACE. The university is providing the ACUE program to its faculty participants at no cost, and as a result of faculty completing the online course, Rutgers–Newark expects the university’s already high graduation rates to continue to rise, along with faculty and student satisfaction.


Photo courtesy of Halkin Mason.
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