



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## "SELF-MADE" PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The most difficult challenges to higher education leaders include helping employees at all levels remain current and improve skills that help them serve students, employees, and the public-at-large. As a result, many institutions are investing extensive financial resources into human resource training and professional development. Smaller institutions experience special challenge, often because they lack financial resources to "outsource" development activities and services or to send large numbers of employees to conferences and workshops. They must find other ways of to provide training, education, and professional development opportunities. With a little imagination, a talented group of employees, and a strong commitment by administrators, faculty, and staff, such a task can be accomplished. At Finger Lakes Community College, this challenge has been addressed effectively.

### Meeting a Need

Approximately three years ago, our college developed a program administered by the human resources office and the college's Institution for Workforce Development, the non-credit arm of the institution that most frequently serves the business and industry community. In this instance, however, the college was to be the customer. After attempting to define the college's own training/education needs, the human resources office developed a series of training options—Excellence in Higher Education and Excellence in Teacher Training programs.

Initially, funding for the program was provided through the FLCC Strategic Excellence Set-Aside program, a mechanism developed by the college to address and fund specific activities that further strategic themes and priorities. Actual training through the program is provided by employees and adjunct trainers who usually teach through the Institute for Workforce Development.

### Implementation

Initially, the program was funded through the Strategic Excellence Fund, money set aside to fund projects judged to contribute significantly to institutional priorities. The program's success has led to its being funded annually through the college's regular operating budget.

Early on, the administration made a significant commitment to the efficacy of this program: Once input from a variety of sources was considered, participation in the program was required, at least for all administrative staff. Over the first year of operation, all administrative employees—from the president of the college to academic department chairs—were required to complete at least three four-hour training modules organized around one or more of three "certificate" programs—Excellence in Supervision, Excellence in Student Services, and Excellence in Workplace Skills. Initially, each could select from among 30 four-hour modules to satisfy the requirement. Topics for the modules included training in advanced supervisory skills and removing negativism from organizations, among others. Forced compliance and subsequent examples actually produced an unexpected effect of encouraging other employees to participate, including teaching faculty and support staff.

In an effort to improve the delivery and value of excellent college services, another set of comprehensive workshops was developed to focus on meeting the needs of the teaching faculty specifically. These workshops were designed to develop effective use of educational technologies, teaching methodologies, and student advisement techniques. Thus, faculty have the opportunity to receive certificates in any of these areas by completing five courses, or modules, under each certificate program.

### Program Success

The success of the program can be measured by the number of certificates issued and individuals participating, as well as by behavioral and performance enhancements on the job. FLCC has approximately 285 full-time employees and 85 of the institution's 100 full-time





faculty have participated during the first 18 months of the program. In the "non-teaching" training curriculum, 86 certificates reflecting employee completion of several modules have been issued. One hundred seventy employees from the teaching, administrative, and support staff have participated in non-teaching training involving supervision, student services, and workplace skills. Do all employees participate? No, but most who were given the opportunity have done so.

Employees who complete groupings of training modules receive certificates of completion signed by the president, the human resources officer, and the Institute for Workforce Development administrator. Employees at all levels, including the president, have earned several certificates. It is refreshing to walk around campus and observe framed certificates—"gold stars"—prominently displayed in offices and work spaces.

It is among the college's goals to promote professional and personal development with application-oriented learning experiences for all employees. These training programs support and encourage the concepts of lifelong learning and learning communities. It is important, especially to smaller and moderate-sized institutions, to evaluate training needs and develop programs that are essential for meeting the short- and long-term goals of the institution, as well as individual staff needs. In the case of this FLCC effort, the program is self-made—we recognized an educational/training need, made a commitment to "take the bull by the horns," and designed and implemented our own successful program. It is one task that community colleges have always done well!

**Daniel T. Hayes**, *President*

**Grace H. Madera**, *Human Resources Officer*

For further information contact the authors at Finger Lakes Community College, 4355 Lake Shore Drive, Canandaigua, NY 14424.

e-mail: hayesdt@flcc.edu or maderagh@flcc.edu.

*Suanne D. Roueche*, *Editor*

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