



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

Published by the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) • College of Education • The University of Texas at Austin

THE COLLEGE LEVEL TEACHING CORE: A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO FACULTY IDENTITY

Increasingly, our institution has focused on improving the selection and professional development of temporary and adjunct faculty members. In some cases, these individuals arrive directly from graduate schools and training programs; in other cases, they are making a transition from government, business, or industry. Often, these are people rich and diverse in personal experience and technical information. However, just as often these individuals lack a substantive understanding of the college culture and contemporary learning environments. This common profile reinforced the importance of an early orientation and training system.

Purpose and Design

Combining key information, active learning techniques and hands-on demonstrations, the *College Level Teaching Core* enhances professional identity, improves communication, strengthens the faculty labor pool, and improves the overall quality of the educational program. This multifaceted program establishes a critical substructure and training opportunity for new faculty members. Improved awareness and early reflection have helped many individuals avoid common pitfalls and prevented problems generated by limited experience with the classroom environment.

Participation is required for tenure track faculty members as a part of the college's Faculty Academy program. However, the majority of the participants are members of our extensive adjunct faculty. Each adjunct faculty member who completes all components of the program is rewarded with a financial stipend of \$150. Individual presentations employ contemporary research, case studies, and professional interaction to develop meaningful perspectives on instructional roles and institutional support systems. The program includes four workshops: (I) Educational Policies and Issues, (II) Learning Theory, (III) Testing and Instruction

(Teacher Effectiveness) and (IV) Educational Technologies. The program is offered twice each academic year during the early part of both the fall and spring semesters. Independent sessions of each core workshop are scheduled on both of the college's two largest campuses.

The Pre-Workshop Survey and Program Planning

A unique feature of the system is the use of a rather extensive preliminary survey instrument which collects information on the needs and interests of registered participants and employs this information to plan more effectively and present each of the four program segments. For each workshop, a substantive list of "areas of focus" has been developed. Several weeks prior to the workshop, faculty members are asked to review these lists and indicate for each area whether they have high interest, moderate interest, or low interest. Low-interest responses can be based on either personal preferences or previous experience and expertise. In addition to frequency responses individual comments are solicited and an open area is provided for "other" areas of interest.

The Workshops

The initial workshop—Educational Policies and Issues—provides a broad cultural and operational overview of the college. Based on survey data, Educational Policies and Issues has placed primary emphasis on the key areas of student interaction and evaluation of instruction. This segment of the core has been particularly successful in adapting a series of case studies, each of which is directly linked to formal college policies and procedures. This method provides faculty members with an efficient review of key policy support areas while at the same time generating a significant amount of individual participation and information sharing. More recently, this session has begun to experiment with a simulation model related to evaluation of instruction. In this context, participants are asked to complete the college's Student Assessment of Instruction form with their own student history in a particular course as



a basis for the response. Following this simulation, the group engages in a roundtable discussion on the relative impact of selected evaluation variables. This approach has been very useful in sensitizing faculty members to the perspectives of the student audience, clarifying the purposes of student assessment, and familiarizing faculty members with the actual evaluation instrument.

The second workshop—Learning Theory—reviews key concepts and research perspectives on student motivation and classroom effectiveness. Over time, two key “areas of focus” have emerged as most critical to the audience: motivation and learning strategies. Presenters have employed a variety of techniques in addressing these areas, including research overviews, discussions and question-answer sessions on expository learning, discovery learning, mastery learning, peer tutoring, and computer-based instruction. Standard information is provided on the definition of and the adaptation to various learning styles. One particularly well-received approach is a segment of the workshop entitled, “What My Students Have Taught Me About Learning.” This historical listing of student perspectives on their most effective teachers offers some important insights on motivation, course design, and instructional technique.

The third workshop—Testing and Instruction (Teacher Effectiveness)—provides a more direct approach to instructional planning, implementation, application, and evaluation. Participant interest related to this workshop is evenly distributed among the various areas listed in the survey instrument. Thus, the workshop design for teacher effectiveness focuses on various forms of testing and instruction as a unified process. Conceptual models of teaching and evaluation are reviewed in terms of assumptions, advantages, and potential weaknesses. Particular emphasis is placed on cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains.

The final workshop—Educational Technologies—provides an extensive hands-on overview of learning resources support services and facilities. In-depth awareness of these services and facilities is critical for all members of the teaching faculty. The highest interests have been associated with media adaptations to instruction, active learning media, and the Internet. This workshop has provided an effective and practical means of orientation and training. Touring of the Learning Resources Centers at the college’s main campuses brings participants in direct contact with library collections, specialized research and media services, computer lab facilities, and access to the community college system and state university system databases.

Overall Assessment

The *College Level Teaching Core* program has been in operation for approximately four years. A standard evaluation instrument is employed to monitor the effectiveness of workshop designs and presentations. Participants are asked to provide scaled responses to questions on workshop substance, relevance to instructional roles, clarity of purpose, organization, personal involvement, usefulness, and tendency to recommend to colleagues. In addition, there are open-ended questions on reasons for participation, most valuable concepts, skill or ideas learned, potential application of skills or techniques, topics of lesser value, and commentary on the usefulness of handouts and reading material. Feedback has improved consistently over this time frame with most scaled responses in the 5-4 (high agreement) range. In addition, there have been many testimonials by program completers reinforcing the value of early training and awareness. This well-designed and carefully planned system has served to clarify and enhance the importance, orientation, and professional development of all new faculty members.

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