



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## IF YOU FEED THEM, THEY WILL COME: TEN COMMANDMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL PROFESSIONAL ENRICHMENT

### Phase I: Professional Development

Two years ago Nash Community College embarked on a campuswide, strategic professional development plan via AVID (Advancement via Individual Determination). This comprehensive professional development included instructional activities that helped change the culture of the entire campus. Being a part of this paradigm shift is one of the most significant and rewarding endeavors witnessed by this young administrator. The goal of this article is to provide lessons learned that can be shared and adapted by other colleges.

During the course of the academic year, the college hosted several types of professional enrichment activities. Efforts were made to ensure these activities impacted the classroom. After careful consideration, the college contracted with AVID's higher education division. AVID is commonly associated with the K-12 setting, but it also includes a growing network of higher education institutions. Part of the contract includes facilitators visiting the campus four times per year to provide sessions customized to the college's instructional needs. In turn, the college faculty became in-house experts and led additional professional development activities ranging from hour-long "snack-and-share" sessions to 30-minute concurrent sessions during a day-long professional development day.

### Phase II: From Professional Enrichment to Blue Love

The August 2013 professional development day launched the unofficial start date of year two and the second phase of the professional development plan. Two new phrases were added to the Nash Community College common language lexicon: "blue love" and "professional enrichment." Both terms emerged organically from actual comments made by instructors as opposed to any contrived marketing campaign.

The college's official color is blue; hence, "blue love" encapsulates the developing culture of focusing

on student success originating with the Quality Enhancement Plan. Blue love means going the extra mile for students by exhibiting compassion and an unwavering commitment to learning. For example, students who are absent from a developmental math class receive a phone call or an email from their instructor as well as two texts from classmates ascertaining their whereabouts. Blue love also conveys the powerful emotions associated with students experiencing academic success for the first time.

A significant initiative that resulted was a change in nomenclature for developmental math and for professional development. The terms "developmental" and "development" denote a deficiency. The college now refers to developmental math as fundamental and refers to professional development as professional enrichment. Students in developmental math are merely in the process of enhancing fundamental skills that are building blocks to success in college-level courses. Likewise, professional enrichment provides instructors with opportunities to improve instructional strategies that enhance student learning.

### Snack-and-Shares

As my grandmother used to say, "feed them, and they will come." This applies to gatherings from church socials to PTA meetings, and professional enrichment at community colleges is no different. There was nearly a revolt at the first staff "development" session because there was no food on hand. (Incidentally, purchasing snacks from an on-campus vendor is also a great way to promote new sales items.)

Phase II of professional enrichment marked the advent of a subcommittee charged with recognizing in-house experts in instructional strategies. The group was also charged with leading monthly staff development sessions signaling a strengthening of professional independence as faculty moved from dependence on outside sources to self-reliance. The college's administration was essential to the process by supporting the snack-and-share meetings and by not dictating the guidelines. "These strategies are not meant to replace any existing expectations," President Carver said. "Rather, it is an opportunity to examine how we can enhance student engagement."

Three snack-and-share sessions were held, with each having its own identity. (See commandment #3

below.) My role as a participant (versus the facilitator) at professional enrichment days afforded me the opportunity to listen to table conversations and gauge informal feedback. Several internal August Professional Development Day speakers were energetic and outwardly passionate—characteristics of blue love. The first snack-and-share theme was “AVID for Introverts,” spawned from the book, *Quiet: The Power of Introverts*. Two talented, but reserved, faculty members led the discussion comparing and contrasting the styles of extraverts (outwardly passionate) and introverts (reserved). By the end of the session, participants could identify traits of each type, as well as how to accommodate both types of personalities in the classroom and within group settings.

The second snack-and-share theme was “Show and Tell.” The title evoked an excitement from the old grade school exercise of sharing something unique with peers. “Sharing” individuals had ten minutes to present a strategy followed by five minutes to answer questions. Submissions included faculty members from the business, criminal justice, nursing, and automotive departments. Each session included dialogue about how best to implement various strategies in other departments. The umbrella of recurring professional development modified the culture to unite former disparate groups into a single set of educators with the shared goal of engaging students.

“Speed dating” was by far the most popular snack-and-share format. Six tables of eight people were assembled. Facilitators had ten minutes to present strategies, and daters moved to the table of their choice after the ten minutes expired. “Daters” signed up for follow-up information by signing a date card with their name and email address. Topics ranged from the online message board padlet ([www.padlet.com](http://www.padlet.com)), to philosophical chairs and jigsaw. Comments included:

- “That [philosophical chairs] was the most exciting thing I’ve tried in the classroom in many years.”
- “That instructor made [philosophical chairs] seem less intimidating. I’m going to try it in my English class.”
- “When are you going to do this [format] again?”

Snack-and-share sessions provided leadership opportunities for faculty to “lead from where they are.” Additionally, faculty members reap the benefits by presenting to and learning from their peers. Both presenters and participants reflect on the learning that takes place campus-wide and how to connect with students more effectively. To reiterate, the goal of snack-and-share is to present successful instructional strategy implementation in a short amount of time. Faculty appreciated the 60-minute timeframe and being able to walk away with the practical ideas already field-tested. The format allowed participants to sample from the varied menu of successful strategies offered on campus.

Lessons learned from redesigning fundamental math courses led to another instructional initiative. Due to the math redesign, the college discovered that a synergy exists when two or more instructors facilitate in the same learning space. Exploring the team concept also allows instructors to work collaboratively on tough concepts found in English composition. One pair of English instructors established the concept of the Ten Commandments for citation (i.e., thou shalt not plagiarize) and presented the Ten Commandments strategy during the most recent snack-and-share session.

### **The 10 Commandments of Professional Enrichment**

The combination and application of instructional strategies in novel ways demonstrate the success of the professional enrichment program. The following list is the reimagining of the Ten Commandments strategy adopted from a snack-and-share session.

*Secure administrative support.* Professional enrichment is simultaneously a top down and a grassroots effort. The president, chief academic officer, chief financial officer, and department chairs all must invest and commit to a strategic professional development plan. Support certainly includes financial resources, but real support also means attending sessions, using positional power to empower faculty members to lead sessions, and encouraging faculty members to attend sessions. Administrators should also present a united front and, most importantly, communicate that this effort will not be replaced with some other “priority-du jour” next year. (AVID represents a three-year commitment.)

*Listen.* Listen to both complaints and praise with the authentic desire to understand rather than to further one’s own agenda. Understand and acknowledge that small barriers such as not having coffee and cookies may negatively contribute to participants’ resistance to the message. Resist the urge to listen solely to the loudest voices. Establish a professional development committee that listens and provides feedback. Strike a balance between what administration wants faculty to know (content) versus how the content is delivered. A survey of participants at the end of each session most definitely should occur. Use the formative assessment strategy of a parking lot. A parking lot can simply be sticky notes on a door as participants leave the room. Debrief with the committee, which is ideally comprised of staff and faculty members. They are privy to hallway conversations and informal comments not included on exit surveys.

*Listen, but don’t take it personally.* The only person who likes change is a baby. Learning is uncomfortable. People have different opinions about various characteristics of professional development. The organizers and presenters will be sensitive to criticism because of the high emotional investment. Celebrate small wins and keep criticism in its proper perspective.

*Include variety.* Vary different aspects of professional enrichment sessions. Experiment with session formats to account for different learning styles. (Some people prefer an overview and some prefer a detailed, in-depth session.) Survey staff and faculty members about timing and remember to include ample times for full-time employees and adjunct instructors to attend professional enrichment.

*Adjust the plan.* Be fluid in the topic selection so sessions are presented that are time sensitive. For example, offering a session on advising in January as a new semester is beginning does not provide faculty members the opportunity to immediately implement lessons learned. Be open to ideas generated through formal and informal channels. Seek opportunities to improve and address feedback.

*Repeat.* Students of all developmental stages benefit from hearing information multiple times. Repeat professional enrichment topics multiple times, provide greater depth in subsequent sessions, and scaffold information. New instructors join the college regularly and roles also change. Repeating information serves to build a strong foundational skill set.

*"Faculty don't do optional."* Many faculty members are inherently lifelong learners and leap at the opportunity to enhance their repertoire of instructional strategies, while others need more concrete expectations. Communicate desired outcomes (i.e., attend a minimum of four sessions per year and implement two new instructional strategies). Outline how attendees will be held accountable for the information learned. Colleges invest in professional enrichment and should require a measurable return on that investment.

*Identify a common language.* Creating a campus-wide common language builds a cohesive learning community. Faculty members in nursing may be using the same strategy as a communication instructor. Therefore, a common language signals a consistent instructional culture. Students learn best practices when the same terms are used consistently across disciplines.

*Reflect.* Provide ample opportunities for faculty to reflect on their own learning individually and in groups. Incorporating time during department meetings provides a community of support for instructors experimenting with new classroom approaches. Informally, hallway conversations and spontaneous discussions between office mates generate support when ideas fail.

*Be organic.* Finally, remain focused on the college's mission when embarking on culture shifts. Allow the process to develop naturally without artificial or forced execution. Seek opportunities to find strengths of the campus and replicate success campus-wide.

## Conclusion

The nature of higher education is changing rapidly and community college leaders must be change agents. Whether we like it or not, Millennials bring a different expectation of learning to campus. The president, with board of trustee support, has set into motion a strategic vision implementing action steps aimed at graduating every student. Bringing faculty together from across the campus on a regular basis to identify barriers and build toward student success altered the trajectory of this campus, and the best is yet to come.

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