Reflections on a Reflective Teaching Community

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Program Format

• Activity organized around themes of strategic importance  
• Seven meetings are held each year  
• Topics are selected in advance that relate to the theme  
• Faculty facilitators are recruited based on their scholarly interests and teaching experiences  
• Each meeting is organized around a common reading  
• The proceedings of the discussions are shared with beyond the community  
• Membership is open, inclusive, and fluid

Meeting Format

• Come for the pizza, stay for the community  
• Facilitator is introduced in relationship to the topic  
• Common reading is recapped and discussed  
• Facilitator moderates using pre-discussed questions  
• Center staff take detailed notes of ideas and resources  
• Proceedings of the discussion posted online with supplemental materials in support of annual theme  
• Debrief with Center staff on session impacts and improvements

Institutional Outcomes & Impacts

Strengthened Campus Teaching & Learning Values

• Networking: Faculty networking provides a place to develop and advance high-quality and high-impact learning opportunities. These connections have been leveraged, for example, to expand undergraduate research opportunities.
• Sharing: The opportunity to share thoughts and resources on teaching and learning practices have allowed the community to support various curriculum improvement efforts. The community has a team of “spokespeople” and a portal of electronic resources that can be leveraged beyond the community.
• Strengthened: Internal opportunities to share teaching and learning practices, such as an annual showcase, are often threatened. The community has served as a place to test and develop ideas with like-minded individuals.

Fostering the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning

• Innovation: Discussion in the community becomes an incubator for identifying and developing ideas for SoT’s inquiry.
• Collaboration: Faculty have used same/similar pedagogies from community discussions and contributed to the development of these ideas through peer feedback and collaborative projects. For example, Teaching With Your Mouth Shut (Finkel, 1999) became a popular resource with faculty, generating several presentations and workshops on its ideas.
• Scholarship: Several faculty have gone on to publish or present on ideas introduced or expanded on in the community, and the community has served as a place to test and develop ideas with like-minded individuals.

Advancing Liberal Learning & Global Citizenship

• Context for growth: General education reform and the community funded a productive partnership to develop and advance pedagogies and practices, including approaches to experiential and integrative learning and strategies to teach intellectual competencies such as writing and critical thinking.
• Evidence-based: The community grounds its discussion in research, which enhances personal and collective outcomes. Backed by internal and external sources of evidence, the community explores how to achieve new learning outcomes within their disciplines.
• Learning: The context provided by a “professional development” experience is reflexive and explorative, and builds different capacity areas: to contribute to a committee or working group working concurrently to create process and policy.

Developing Leadership for Teaching & Learning

• Expertise: Faculty members are encouraged to shape the direction of the community, including leading sessions about key teaching and learning topics for which they bring deep insights and/or disciplinary perspective. This helps develop and extend faculty voices on topics of student learning.
• Mission: The community provides a space to relate the mission of the university to faculty-led activities that demonstrate the pursuit of that mission. For example, by dedicating a year to the exploration of “transformation,” participants helped elucidate transformation and its related educational practices.
• Competency: Faculty identified different capacity areas then a committee or working group is supported to lead learning-centered discussion in other contexts.

The Reflective Teaching Community was established by faculty to become a place to re-convene after faculty development experiences to explore how they applied what they had learned and to discuss ideas and issues related to their teaching. As the community has developed, it has become a place to take key teaching and learning topics for discussion in an effort to connect ideas, concerns, and opportunities through collective reflection. This process over a five-year period has provided significant personal and institutional outcomes.

Review themes from previous years, topics covered in the institution’s faculty development programs, and available data on university-wide faculty needs to select a general trajectory for the year.

Break theme into component topics of particular use to the community. Research background information on topics for organizers and select potential readings.

Approach individual faculty members to facilitate sessions based on their interests (both members of the community and potential new members), meet with facilitators before and after each session.

Each year, post notes and additional pedagogical materials to the community’s website. Solicit feedback at the end of the year to engage in cyclic process of continual growth and improvement.

References