

FLC Facilitator Training Workshop Handout

For use at UT Health Science Center at San Antonio, Academic Center for Excellence in Teaching with Roberta Ambrosino (participant in the 9th Annual Institute & Conference for Faculty Learning Community Developers / Facilitators)

Outcomes:

After this session, participants will be able to:

1. Identify the goals of implementing faculty learning communities on campus
2. Describe the basic definitions and models of faculty learning communities
3. Imagine a faculty learning community offering
4. List the implementation and sustainability issues facing their efforts
5. Consider ways of assessing faculty learning communities

Background – Knowledge Probe

Begin with the following questions:

A faculty learning community is _____

Our campus is implementing faculty learning communities to _____

Evidence of success will include _____

(Background Knowledge Probe is a classroom assessment technique that can be found in Angelo and Cross (1993) *Classroom Assessment Techniques*. Jossey-Bass.)

UTHSCSA Mission Statement

One of the missions of The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio is to serve the needs of the citizens of Texas, the nation, and the world through programs committed to excellence and designed to educate a diverse student body to become excellent health care providers and scientists. <http://www.uthscsa.edu/op/mission.asp>

1. Sample Goals for FLC

- Increase curricular coherence
- Promote deep learning
- Build community
- Revitalize faculty
- Revitalize the institution
- Promote diversity

- Increase retention
- Enhance teaching and learning opportunities

Jot down your ideas for specific goals for your learning community.

2. Definition

What is a faculty learning community?

Remember, the definition has to be adapted to fit your specific needs.

A faculty learning community is a group of multidisciplinary faculty engaging in an active, collaborative, year-long program with a curriculum about enhancing teaching and learning and with frequent seminars and activities that provide learning, development, multidisciplinary, the scholarship of teaching and learning, and community building. (Cox, 2008, p. 7)

...a continuous process of learning and reflection, supported by colleagues, with an intention of getting things done. (McGill & Beaty, 2001, p. 11)

Model Examples

Cohort-based learning communities address the teaching, learning, and developmental needs of an important cohort of faculty or staff that has been particularly affected by the isolation, fragmentation, stress, neglect, or chilly climate in the academy. The curriculum of such a yearlong community is shaped by the participants to include a broad range of teaching and learning areas and topics of interest to them. These communities will make a positive impact on learning areas and topics of interest to them. These communities will make a positive impact on the culture of the institution over the years if given multi-year support. Four examples of cohort-based communities are those for junior faculty, for mid-career and senior faculty, for Preparing Future Faculty (graduate students), for department chairs, and for part-time and adjunct faculty (Cox, 2008, p. 12).

Topic-based learning communities have curricula designed to address a special campus or divisional teaching and learning need, issue, or opportunity. Faculty and professional staff members may propose topics to the FLC program director, who then advertises a call for applications across the university. These FLCs offer membership to and provide opportunities for learning across all faculty ranks and cohorts, plus graduate students and appropriate professional staff. They focus on a

specific theme. A particular topic-based faculty learning community may end when the campus-wide teaching opportunity or issue of concern has been satisfactorily explored and addressed (Cox, 2008, p. 12).

3. *Imagine a Faculty Learning Community*

1. Purpose: What do you want the FLC to accomplish? How do you plan to bring about the above goals through specific objectives for an FLC?

2. Curriculum: What issues and opportunities will be addressed within an FLC?

3. Recruiting, Eligibility, Application: How will advertising happen? Is there a public relations aspect?

4. Selection: What is the process, the criteria? Will there be a balance among disciplines, needs, gender, experience?

5. Recognition and Awards: What is the budget? Where will financial support come from? Are there extrinsic benefits to FLC participation?

6. Dates: What meeting format works for this group (seminars, presentations, retreats, conferences, social gatherings)? What length, frequency, location, social amenities will be optimal?

7. Facilitators: How will leadership of the FLC be structured? Who will be facilitators?

8. Scholarly Process: Document the process as well as the content. Is there a focus book or article? A focus course? An individual or group teaching project? A product such as a scholarly presentation, publication, report, course portfolio, curricular design, website, or campus seminar?

9. Assessment: How will you assess faculty development of the participants? How will you assess program components? How will you assess student learning in the classes of FLC participants?

(Cox, 2008, p. 35)

4. Implementation and Sustainability Issues

Potential Pitfalls for FLC Facilitators to Avoid:

To be optimally successful, it is important that learning communities are not only clearly structured experiences that occur with some regularity, but also that members are granted room to explore and to pursue areas of related interest, to react spontaneously within the general structures set out by the program and agreed upon by each group (Petroni & Ortquist-Ahrens, 2004, p. 68).

The first set of pitfalls have to do with a facilitator's inability to read the environment and make the necessary adjustments. As a consequence, facilitators may respond with:

Too much structure

- Being too directive
- Being too didactic
- Squelching creativity

Too little structure

- Failing to clarify expectations for projects/outcomes, etc.
- Failing to establish guidelines or ground rules for the group
- Failing to engage in team building, to promote positive group processes (Petroni & Ortquist-Ahrens, 2004, p. 68).

Implementation and Sustainability Issues

- Securing administrative support
- Recruiting faculty interest and support
- Meeting faculty needs (e.g. time, teaching, scholarship, career)
- Selecting an FLC program director and facilitator
- Locating funding

- Matching assessment activities to community outcomes
- Sharing FLC successes with others

List other potential implementation and sustainability issues

5. Assessment

In order to evaluate the progress of an FLC toward obtaining its objectives, there are at least three areas to involve: An assessment of faculty development outcomes of the participants, FLC program components, and the learning of students in the courses of FLC members (Cox, 2008, p. 183).

Accreditation agencies now look more closely at effective faculty development support offered by institutions. Assessment provides evidence of success when a strong case for continued funding and support is needed. It can be used in accreditation reports. Provide a means for assessing the effectiveness of the objectives of the community, both short- and long-term. A mid-year and final evaluation and report in addition to evaluations of each seminar provide evidence of success and ways to improve various aspects of the community. Collect pre- and post-community syllabi to illustrate changes inspired by participation. Have each participant select a focus course. Participants should prepare a course mini-portfolio for their focus course (Cox, 2008, p.183).

It is best to conduct major assessment in the middle of your year and near the end before your community disperses at the conclusion. You can do this online or you can guild in an “evaluation session” in your last meeting, ensuring summary documents will be completed, but summaries will have to be prepared off the completed hard copies. More careful reflection, teaching project reports, and the like will take more time and may need to be completed “over the summer.” It may be a hassle to get the completed reports, but loyalty to the community usually produces results, although sometimes a “guilty” report arrives two years later (Cox, 2008, p. 183).

If you are using pre- and post-syllabi or other instruments) to measure development, be sure to collect a pre-FLC syllabus from each person for the term before or as the FLC begins. If you are doing an opening retreat, collect syllabi in a booklet for perusal before the retreat so the members learn what and how others are teaching (Cox, 2008, p.183).

Assessment of seminars should be done to determine the effectiveness of the session and to discern improvements for upcoming sessions (Cox, 2008, p. 183).

Jot down your ideas for an assessment of:

Faculty development outcomes for the participants

FLC program components

Learning of students in the courses of FLC members

References

Cox, M.D. (2008). Faculty learning community: *Program director's handbook and facilitator's handbook* (5th ed.). Oxford, Ohio: Miami University.

McGill, I., & Beaty, L. (2001). *Action learning* (2nd ed. revised). Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Petrone, M.C. & Ortquist-Ahrens, L. (2004). Facilitating faculty learning communities: A compact guide to creating change and inspiring community. In M.D. Cox & L. Richlin (Eds.), *Building faculty learning communities* (pp. 63-69). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.