

The Journey: Waukesha County Technical College's Comprehensive Faculty Development Model

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Abstract

The orientation and integration of newly-hired full-time faculty into their new career is essential to their long-term success and more importantly to the success of the students who will be sitting in the classroom. The focus of this paper is on how Waukesha County Technical College in Pewaukee, WI tore down and rebuilt the way in which new faculty are prepared for transition from industry to higher education. An exploration of how the need for a change arose as well as the process that was used to develop “*The Journey*” comprehensive professional development model for new full-time faculty is conducted. Additionally, a cursory look at the components of the program and how it is rooted in a mentor/mentee relationship is provided. The paper concludes with a summary of the challenges that have been encountered.

Introduction

Higher education in the State of Wisconsin has undergone significant changes in the past decade.. With the 2011, passing of Wisconsin Act 10 (budget repair bill) by the state legislature, which severely limited the scope of collective bargaining for public employees, including technical college faculty, the exodus of veteran faculty began. In August 2012, at Waukesha County Technical College (WCTC), 24 new full-time faculty began their teaching careers and this trend in faculty turnover is expected to continue for the coming years.

New faculty must unravel the organizational structures and values, expectations for performance and advancement, and the history and traditions of their new campus setting. At the same time, they must balance complex and sometimes conflicting roles and responsibilities. The ability of new faculty to navigate these early years is critical to their success in and satisfaction with an academic career. (Sorcinelli, 1994, p. 174)

Faculty that are hired at WCTC come in with years of experience in an occupation other than teaching. They are welders, nurses, counselors, accountants, and chefs to name a few. Upon their hiring, they are now educators at an institution of higher learning and we drop them into a classroom and expect them to prepare classes, create syllabi, utilize various pedagogical approaches, assess student learning, manage their classroom, and the list goes on and on. This presents a unique challenge and unfortunately most transitional educators do not have the skill base that encompasses all of the areas of being a professional educator (Holyfield and Berry, 2008).

Past Practice

Prior to the development of our current new faculty development model, the college used a “bootcamp” model of new faculty development. New faculty were brought in the week before classes started to attend a two-day teacher bootcamp that included a smorgasbord of topics. It was more of a content dump than it was a workshop. By the end of the two days, new instructors were typically overwhelmed with all the information. This made it very difficult to reflect on,

process, and ultimately use what they had learned in their teaching. This two day bootcamp was followed by a one-day new employee orientation provided by the Human Resources department. In addition to the two day session and the new instructor orientation, new faculty participated in monthly “Beyond Bootcamp” visits to the instructional and service departments throughout the college to broaden their knowledge of the college. A study done by Lindbeck and Darnell (2008) revealed that of 92 non-Research 1 universities and colleges, the majority only committed two days for new faculty orientation. This research finding is consistent to what was being done at WCTC.

The Journey Begins

During the Fall 2010 and Spring 2011 semesters all employees of the college were given the opportunity to provide input as to what areas the college needs to focus on for inclusion into a new Academic Master Plan. A total of 350 employees of the college provided input that yielded 1600 comments through a World Café approach, and the development of our new full-time faculty emerged as one of the top priorities. As a result of the theme and the high priority ranking, a cross-college team was charged with developing a new way of preparing our new faculty hires for their new career.

The team worked through a process to determine what new faculty need to know and when they needed to know it. The team worked through an affinity process that ultimately led to the new instructor competencies focused on excellence in teaching. Using the new instructor competencies, the team developed a comprehensive program to help new instructors meet these competencies throughout their first year of full-time teaching at WCTC. The comprehensive program, known as *The Journey*, has two primary components: new instructor mentoring and highly structured workshops focused on classroom practice.

Blending the People and the Program

Mentor Model

Supporting new instructors as they begin their teaching profession is important work. There is no higher calling than teaching and no more important institution than education. Mentors can shape the professional growth of their colleagues and the practice of new instructors. It is important to retain instructors, to help accelerate the development of high-achieving instructors, and to improve student achievement. New instructor mentoring became the foundation of our comprehensive professional development model.

The primary goal of *The Journey* is to provide a supportive, confidential environment in which instructors work together to improve classroom instruction. An additional focus is to create a community of lifelong, reflective learners who continually strive to improve learner achievement.

A detailed list of expectations for both mentors and mentees was developed by the work team. Some of the key mentor expectations are to coach and assist new instructor with curriculum development, classroom management, instructional strategies, lesson planning, assessment of student performance, and all aspects of professional development. Of equal importance is the development of a trusting and reflective professional partnership between the two faculty. An overall key expectation for the new faculty mentees is to become a reflective practitioner who continually strives to improve student learning.

Mentor Selection and Training

The recruitment and selection of mentors is the single most important task of *The Journey*. The quality of the mentor is critical with respect to new instructor development. Recruitment of mentors needs to be strategic and purposeful, not left open to “come one, come all” approach.

To recruit mentors, a list of selection criteria was developed. Deans and Associate Deans were asked to identify possible mentors that meet these criteria. Once mentors were identified, a personal invitation to apply was extended. A short interview process followed where information about instructional mentoring, and the roles and responsibilities of the mentor were shared and discussed. Final decisions on mentors were determined.

WCTC Mentor Training is a one-day foundational training that focuses on the knowledge and skills that are critical for those who work with new instructors. The training is guided by the belief that learning to teach is a career-long developmental process. The main work of the mentor is to respond to each new instructor’s developmental and contextual needs and to promote ongoing examination of classroom practice.

Structured Workshops

In addition to the mentoring, professional development workshops during the first year are designed to help accelerate the development of high-achieving instructors. The workshops are designed to help the new instructors meet the competencies that the Wisconsin Technical College System requires of all full-time faculty. These competencies include instructional design and development, teaching methods, and assessment of student learning.

The workshops are facilitated by our mentors and other experienced faculty within the college. The workshop themes include creating an effective learning environment, designing and developing instruction, engaging students in learning, assessing learning, and developing as a teaching professional.

The workshops are supported by the regularly scheduled mentor/mentee conversations during the month following each workshop. Mentors focus on helping mentees apply what they learned in the workshop to their classroom practice.

Workshop Assessment

At the end of each monthly workshop, a written evaluation is given to each new faculty member. The format of the survey is such that they are asked about their overall knowledge of the topic prior to the workshop and then their knowledge of it at the conclusion of the workshop. A nine-point likert scale is used, and there is also a place for the respondents to add additional comments. The results indicate that there has been a significant increase in the knowledge base for each workshop that has been delivered. Additionally, many positive comments are received from instructional managers, new faculty, and faculty mentors that the program is excellent and that the new hires are progressing well.

Challenges

While the assessment of the workshops has been positive, the program has not been without challenges. In particular, there are three areas that will need to be addressed for the coming year. The first centers on mentor accountability. Although a real effort was made to secure a solid group of mentors, we have had some mentor accountability issues where the expectations of being a mentor have not been met. In addition, we have had some mentees who are convinced that they have nothing to learn from *The Journey*. This is particularly true for some of those who have taught courses as an adjunct faculty member.

The second challenge has been that the original order of the workshop delivery did not meet the timing needs of the mentees. As we have worked through this first year, we learned that what was needed by the mentees was not delivered at the time that they needed it. An example is that we did not deliver the workshop on the assessment of student learning until November and ideally, it should have been in September. This will be monitored on a continual basis to make sure the mentees needs are met.

The final challenge is finding the lead person to plan, organize, and assess *The Journey* on an ongoing basis. In the future, for this program to continue to develop and add value, it will be important that it find a home within the college where it will get the attention that it needs to thrive.

Compensation Model

As with any new initiative the question of how payment is determined always emerges. In the early stages of developing the program, it was clear that we did not want veteran faculty signing up to be mentors because of additional monetary compensation. As a result, there is no additional cash for mentors. In order to free up the necessary time for both the mentors and mentees many instructional managers were able to offer a one-course release from their teaching responsibilities. While this works well in areas where faculty are teaching three-credit courses, some areas were not able to use this model. If a course release was not possible, this became the only college service requirement for the year. Since part of the program started before the start

of the instructor contract days, a modest stipend of \$525 per faculty member was paid. There have been no complaints from either group of faculty with the compensation model that was used and it is the model that will be used going forward.

Summary

WCTC has created a comprehensive professional development model for new full-time faculty. *The Journey* is rooted in a year-long workshop style format and strong mentor-mentee relationship. Through a deliberative mentor selection process the new faculty are paired with a veteran faculty member who excels at teaching. Some realignment of workshops needs to be done which will provide for more timely dissemination of information. Additionally, the sustainability of the program is dependent on finding the right person to carry it forward. The successful development of new faculty is paramount for their career and for the students that have them in the classroom.

References

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