

# **ENHANCING FACULTY ENGAGEMENT IN TEACHING AND LEARNING THROUGH A TEACHING AND LEARNING FELLOWS PROGRAM**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Teaching excellence is vitally important to effective business education, yet it is often overlooked. This paper outlines one university's efforts to promote teaching excellence through a program which gives reassigned time to one faculty member per college to devote to developing programs and strategies to improve teaching. By providing reassigned time for this effort, the university is signaling the importance of developing teaching excellence.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

As management academics have long known, it is folly to reward A while hoping for B (Kerr, 1975). And yet, too often that is what business schools do. Business schools hope the faculty members are good teachers, but it is typically research activities that get rewarded through additional released or reassigned time, increased raises, or greater weight in promotion and tenure decisions. Deans hope the faculty will engage in continuous improvement in their teaching, but often do not facilitate those activities through sponsored teaching and learning activities in the business schools.

This paper describes an effort of one university to provide faculty with course released time, or a reassigned load, to devote to the purposeful thinking about teaching and learning. In this model, a cohort of faculty develops activities and designs experiences to help their colleagues with teaching and learning development. The goal of this program is to encourage continuous improvement and innovation in teaching through providing faculty with the support they need in order to spend time on these efforts. This paper will outline the program, discuss the activities that have been developed, and discuss the benefits of the program. This program has been in place one year.

## **FACULTY TEACHING DEVELOPMENT**

Mundy et al. (2012) noted that faculty are scholars and a need exists to provide faculty with on-going professional development opportunities to enable the scholar who teaches his subject to become a meaningful teacher of students. Much of the literature regarding the teaching development of business faculty is either discipline specific (i.e., Accounting, Finance,

Management, Marketing), related to the teaching of topics such as international or ethics, or related to the specific delivery method such as online classes (Fang, 2007). Mundy et al. (2012) noted that it is necessary to be proactive and provide continual professional development to faculty that encourages lifetime learning. Nathan (1994) asserted that development programs organized around the departmental unit are the most effective and most valued types of programs. There appears to be consensus that teaching development activities are important at the university level, but there are many different methods and approaches that can be taken. The approach taken by our university is outlined below.

## **ONE APPROACH TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHING AND LEARNING**

The program was developed by the Center for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning (CETL). CETL's primary purpose is the professional development of faculty and staff. It is well known across campus for its workshops and seminars on a wide variety of topics. With the exception of the Associate Director and one part-time CETL staff member, who has a half-time appointment in an academic college, the CETL staff members are not faculty members. The Associate Director for Faculty Development sought to increase the engagement of faculty in the teaching and learning development activities. She felt it was important to get faculty involved and engaged with these activities. Faculty know the issues facing faculty and might be a more credible liaison with other faculty members. In her effort to gain more faculty engagement, the Associate Director for Faculty Development developed a model for a Teaching and Learning Fellow (TL Fellow) from each college. The goals of the TL Fellow program are as follows:

- To effectively expand institutional faculty development capacity by implementing a faculty-teaching-faculty model;
- To customize specific faculty development initiatives within each college based on each college's priorities and disciplinary and instructional contexts;
- To help meet faculty teaching and learning needs and support the scholarship of teaching and more broadly, engaged scholarship, involving external communities;
- To share and disseminate best practices among the T&L Fellows, thus creating opportunities for faculty in different colleges to be exposed to discipline-specific teaching and learning strategies and potentially those that are also the focus of another college.
- To support and promote the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning as an appropriate research outlet.

Faculty fellows were selected based on their demonstrated successful experience with teaching and learning strategies, in either face-to face classroom, online or hybrid environments; a strong interest in the advancement of the scholarship of teaching and learning and supporting such tradition at UNC; a capacity and enthusiasm to work collegially within the college and beyond and where relevant, experience with engaged scholarship and with teaching and learning with off-campus communities.

The TL Fellows receive one course reassigned time per semester to devote time to working on teaching and learning activities within their college. Receiving a course of reassigned, or released, time helps the TL Fellows to take on the challenge of this assignment and devote appropriate amount of time to the task, while balancing other career responsibilities of research, teaching, and other service responsibilities.

The TL Fellows work within their college to ascertain teaching and learning needs and to develop activities that meet those needs. The TL Fellows also meet to discuss their ideas and to share ideas across their colleges. Although college needs may vary, there is also a lot of commonality regarding the teaching and learning issues in each college. The TL Fellows have developed panels together for the university community. The topic of one panel was grading tips. Each TL Fellow developed a grading tip they discussed and the audience participated with questions or shared their own grading tips. A future panel is going to be developed around the issues associated with student teams. These university-wide panels illustrate the commonality of many of the teaching and learning issues.

Other issues may be more college-specific because of cultural or discipline reasons. For example, the TL Fellow for one college developed a forum regarding increasing the response rate of online teaching evaluations (for face-to-face classes, but the evaluation is conducted online, versus evaluating an online course). The college had made the move to online teaching evaluations, but was concerned about some low response rates versus the higher response rates that were seen for the teaching evaluations administered in class. Although teaching evaluations is a universal issue for the university, the cultures of the colleges are very different. This particular college embraced the move to online teaching evaluations, but just wanted to hear strategies for improving response rates. Another college within the university had a different culture and had large pockets of opposition to online teaching evaluations. A forum in that college would have focused more on the pros and cons of online teaching evaluations.

Although the model of faculty engagement we have described is at the university level, it could very easily be adapted to a business school. Instead of having a TL Fellow from each college within the university, the structure could be adapted to have a TL Fellow in each department within the business school. The close affiliation of their disciplines might be beneficial in planning joint activities.

The results from the first year of the TL Fellow program show that significant inroads and connections were made in each college. There are five Fellows from each college. The Fellows have all met and interacted both with Deans and leadership teams in their colleges and hosted smaller informal sessions to assess needs and support faculty's teaching and learning. On several occasions fellows have been able to partner either with one another or with colleagues from within their college.

In addition to the larger events, fellows have participated in working lunch meetings every month as a small group with the Associate Director to reflect on activities, brainstorm and discuss hot topics, issues and challenges related to teaching and learning. These have been rich and productive sessions, which yielded insight and mutual exchange across colleges. Fellows have requested that these sessions be extended next year. All five fellows have indicated that they will continue into the next academic year.

Specifically, within the College of Business, the TL Fellow hosted an open forum for business faculty to get to know the CETL professionals, so faculty would know the services they provide and whom they can call for help for particular issues. The Business TL Fellow also

hosted five teaching roundtables for business faculty. By tailoring these teaching roundtables specifically to business faculty, it meets the discipline-specific nature encouraged by Nathan (1994). The teaching roundtables were on the following topics:

- “How Faculty Can Use Capital IQ in their Classes”, October 3
- “How Can I Promote Deep Lasting Student Learning”, November 6
- “How to Increase Response Rates on Student Evaluations”, November 19
- “Service Learning and the University’s Civic Engagement Plan”, March 6
- “Resources for Teaching Business Ethics”, April 10

Additionally, the Business TL Fellow from the College of Business participated in university-wide TL events such as a faculty forum on “Making the Grade: An Interactive Panel on Proven Grading Practices and Effective Techniques” and the Teaching and Learning Fair.

## **CONCLUSION**

It is time for business schools and universities as a whole, to recognize, using the words of Kerr (1975), the folly of rewarding A, while hoping for B. If schools value good teaching, they must provide faculty development opportunity related to teaching. To give released time for teaching and learning activities signals a school’s commitment to teaching and learning and makes it viewed as equal in importance to research. This proposal outlines one university’s approach to do enhance the engagement of faculty in the teaching and learning activities of the university. The activities developed by the TL Fellows increased the dialogue within the college and the university about techniques, resources, and innovative approaches that may be used to enhance the learning of our students.

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