

Promoting Excellence in Teaching Through Faculty Development

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Introduction

Fostering the creation of a campus culture in which teaching and learning is the subject of thoughtful discussion, debate, and inquiry has achieved increased prominence throughout the national collegiate community. There is widespread interest in teaching as a scholarly activity, motivated in large measure by the work of Ernest Boyer and the Carnegie Foundation report *Scholarship Reconsidered* (Boyer, 1990). The concept of teaching as scholarly work quickly gained the attention of academia as both supporters and skeptics began wrestling with the implications of terms such as the scholarship of discovery, the scholarship of integration, the scholarship of application, and the scholarship of teaching. It was after a follow-up publication, *Scholarship Assessed* (Glassick, Huber, & Maeroff, 1997), offered six criteria applicable to all forms of scholarship that a critical mass of faculty members throughout the country began orienting their research and professional development around topics that informed practice and enhanced the wisdom of practitioners.

Providing an environment in which faculty members can address practical, professional problems and seek faculty support in refining existing teaching practices is quickly becoming the *modus operandi* in college teaching. Faculty commitment to extending their teaching repertoire to include the use of effective teaching models, pedagogical techniques, and assessment alternatives is at an all-time high. More and more faculty are interested in learning to apply and critically evaluate new knowledge and practices within a given context or situation. Institutions of all sizes interested in promoting teaching effectiveness are seeking support in the areas of increased availability of a variety of resources and documented research related to effective teaching practices. This paper provides an overview of how faculty attention has been focused on excellence in teaching at North Georgia College & State University (NGCSU) during the past two years. Through the efforts of past and present recipients of the Regents' Distinguished Professor for Teaching and Learning award, widespread but

unfocused interest in improving the quality of teaching has been channeled into a centralized focus. Examples of activities, initiatives, and web-based delivery strategies that have been particularly successful in focusing attention on enhancing teaching effectiveness are presented.

Faculty Survey

A survey of personal interests, needs, and expertise related to professional development from a list of 24 possible topic areas was sent via e-mail to all NGCSU faculty. Topic areas included recognizing and rewarding teaching excellence, classroom assessment techniques, learning styles, technology-based applications, promoting active learning, faculty evaluation, web-based course development, using the Web as an instructional tool, pre- and post-tenure review, and teaching portfolios. Survey results formed the basis for the initial faculty development offerings in the form of discussion groups, seminars, and workshops.

Web Page

The Excellence in Teaching at NGCSU Web page was created and linked to over 75 search engines including AltaVista, Infoseek, Lycos, Magellan, and WebCrawler. The web page included links to the university mission statement and goals, discussion lists and forums, workshops and seminars, faculty mentoring program, teaching resources, *The Teacher* newsletter, teaching excellence faculty retreat, contact information, and current Regents' Distinguished Professor for Teaching and Learning.

Faculty Mentoring Program

Two goals for a faculty mentoring program for new and adjunct faculty were identified: (a) to promote teaching excellence among pre-tenure review and adjunct faculty, and (b) to assist new and adjunct faculty to achieve their full potential through collaboration with experienced, successful faculty members. During the initial year of this program, eight faculty mentors participated in a training session and

volunteered their time to provide confidential assistance to new faculty members in areas such as classroom observation, implementing varied teaching and assessment strategies, preparing for pre-tenure review, documentation of teaching effectiveness, and development of faculty evaluation goals. Faculty members who had not participated in the pre-tenure review process and who were interested in participating in the mentoring program were invited via e-mail and a memo to visit the Excellence in Teaching at NGCSU Web page and to select the mentoring program hyperlink. Once the mentoring teams were formed, the Web page was updated.

Faculty Newsletter

The Teacher, a newsletter focusing on excellence in teaching at NGCSU, was designed to serve as a catalyst for promoting attention on teaching as a scholarly activity and as a venue for publication of teaching-related research. During 1998-99 issues were published in October, November, January, March, and May. Each issue was made available in print form as well as on-line at the Excellence in Teaching at NGCSU website.

Workshops and Seminars

Forty-one faculty development seminars and workshops addressing 13 areas of faculty-identified interest were organized and conducted during the first year's effort. Session topics included faculty mentoring program training, web-based course development, using the Web as an instructional tool, technology-based applications, teaching strategies, introduction to teaching portfolios, preparing for pre-tenure review, preparing for post-tenure review, addressing varied learning styles, peer review, faculty evaluation, classroom assessment techniques, and promoting active learning. Thirty-three faculty members from throughout the academic disciplines served as presenters. Certificates of appreciation were prepared and given to each presenter, and certificates of attendance were given to each participant.

Faculty Discussion Groups

Discussion forums addressing how to recognize and reward teaching excellence were organized. Small working groups prepared five recommendations for recognizing and rewarding teaching excellence and presented them for reaction and feedback to the

NGCSU faculty via *The Teacher*. Three of the five recommendations were realized during the 1998-99 academic year. Recommendations included: (a) off-campus faculty retreat designed to celebrate excellence in teaching and to stimulate dialogue about teaching and learning; (b) teaching recognition awards program; (c) outstanding teaching award monetary grants of \$1000 for the purchase of materials, supplies, software, etc. relating directly to teaching; (d) initiating faculty development leaves of absence at NGCSU; and (e) promoting teaching excellence as a scholarly activity for faculty evaluation, promotion, and tenure purposes. Discussion forum participants served as the planning team for the first teaching excellence faculty retreat, identified focus areas and judging criteria for the teaching awards program, and developed nomination criteria for the teaching award monetary grants.

Faculty Retreat

The first Excellence in Teaching at NGCSU faculty retreat was a two-day overnight event. The featured speaker for the opening luncheon was Dr. James L. Muyskens, University System of Georgia Board of Regents Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. Approximately 45 faculty, department heads, deans, Vice President and Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, President, and Board of Regents Vice Chancellor joined together as a community of learners. The keynote speaker was Dr. Rita Dunn, Director of the Center for the Study of Learning and Teaching Styles, St. John's University. One of the most meaningful outcomes of the faculty retreat was an opportunity for cross-disciplinary discussions related to teaching and learning. An outgrowth of this retreat was the establishment of a faculty bulletin board for teaching and learning on WebCT.

Teaching Awards Program

The Recognizing Excellence in Teaching at NGCSU awards program was established to recognize faculty who are dedicated and committed to teaching and learning. Nominations were sought from students, faculty, staff, and alumni through faculty, student, and alumni newsletters, local newspapers, and campus e-mail. One outstanding teacher in the areas of innovation, relating to students, technology utilization, promoting active learning, bringing scholarship into the classroom, incorporating writing, incorporating

oral presentations, and developing critical thinking was selected for recognition. Winners in each area were recognized at the fall faculty meeting, had their names placed on a multi-year plaque located in the NGCSU Student Center, and agreed to share their expertise and experiences with colleagues at a faculty workshop.

Teaching Award Monetary Grants

Ten monetary awards of up to \$1000 tied to the purchase of materials, supplies, software, etc. and directly related to teaching were awarded to selected NGCSU faculty. Department heads and deans were asked to identify the most outstanding teachers in their departments or schools who clearly demonstrated teaching excellence, as judged by their rating on the teaching portion of NGCSU's annual faculty evaluation instrument. Faculty were then invited to submit a grant application that included requested items and costs, course(s) to be enhanced, and a rationale. A committee chaired by the 1998-99 Regents' Distinguished Professor for Teaching and Learning and appointed by the Vice President for Academic Affairs reviewed the applications and determined the recipients.

Teaching and Learning Center Proposal

NGCSU's faculty senate appointed a six-member ad hoc teaching and learning center proposal committee. The task of the committee was twofold: (a) to make recommendations to the faculty senate for instituting a teaching and learning center on the NGCSU campus that would add continuity to the university's mission, guarantee accessibility to materials for faculty development, and foster mentoring among faculty, and (b) to include goals for the program and specific programmatic and physical requirements for meeting the goals including faculty staffing, release time, annual budget, and physical space.

A mission statement and goals for the Excellence in Teaching Center at NGCSU were developed. Programmatic components included recommendations for staffing qualifications, responsibilities, teaching load, budget projections, and funding source possibilities. Facilities components included space requirements and square footage. In addition, a three-year implementation plan was developed. A unanimous decision by the faculty senate supported the concept of a Teaching and Learning Center on the

NGCSU campus.

Student Technology Advisors

Modeled after Kennesaw State University's Student Technology Advisors (STARS) program, a significantly reduced version of this program was designed for implementation at NGCSU during 1999-2000. A program coordinator and four students were selected to assist faculty in the development and implementation of technology into their instructional delivery. The STARS students were also utilized as assistants during hands-on faculty technology training sessions.

Carnegie Teaching Academy Campus Program

During the 1999-2000 academic year, NGCSU's faculty began participating in level one of the Carnegie Teaching Academy Campus Program. A campus conversations steering committee was formed and coordinated a series of faculty conversations designed to establish NGCSU's definition of the scholarship of teaching. Subsequent steps will involve campus inquiry groups in studying and acting on a teaching issue central to the campus community.

Conclusion

As each campus community grapples with issues related to how and why students learn and the role faculty play in fostering that learning, it is certain that ongoing discussions about teaching and learning, faculty investigations of their teaching practices, new ways of assessing the effects of new pedagogies, alternative forms for documenting teaching, and new rubrics and tools for gathering and reviewing evidence about teaching will continue to flourish. The opportunity for and responsibility of local institutions to provide a supportive and stimulating atmosphere focusing on teaching excellence is tremendous. Yet it remains the responsibility of local campuses to determine what avenues for promoting teaching excellence are best suited to their unique campus mission, culture, and needs. Lest it be forgotten, faculty members are poised and ready to share their knowledge and experiences in on-campus as well as off-campus activities.

References

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- Glassick, C. E., Huber, M. T., & Maeroff, G. I. 1997. *Scholarship assessed: Evaluation of the professoriate*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.