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State-wide Faculty Development Conference Promotes Vitality

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During the past few years there has been an increasing interest in regional or state-wide faculty development efforts (e.g., Bush Regional Collaboration in Faculty Development, Great Lakes Colleges Association, Kentucky Consortium for Faculty Development, Massachusetts Faculty Development Consortium). This case study describes a state-wide faculty development conference from the perspective of two of the faculty developers who coordinated the program. We will describe the evolution, goals, and elements of the program, lessons learned from administering the program, and some directions for the future. Our intention is to describe what worked well in the hope that some of our experiences can be adapted by faculty developers and administrators on other campuses.

The Need Addressed

Many institutions of higher education currently are faced with limited financial resources, shifting student enrollments, aging faculty with lowered mobility, and increasingly, demands to recruit and retain new faculty (Boyer, 1987; Eble & McKeachie, 1985; Schuster & Bowen, 1986). Under these circumstances, faculty career development is a critical issue—for students who seek a quality education, faculty members who

seek satisfying and productive careers, and colleges and universities that seek institutional effectiveness and vitality.

A number of colleges and universities have established faculty development programs as one way of addressing this issue. Such programs are as diverse as the institutions they serve. Activities may include grants to individual faculty for designing or revising courses, for developing teaching skills, for initiating new lines of research, and for further study or coursework. Campuses call upon directors of such programs to coordinate a variety of scholarly, teaching, and service related activities designed to meet the particular needs of faculty members. These "faculty developers" play an important role in maintaining and enhancing the career development of their institutions' most vital resource—the faculty.

Nonetheless, the ideals of faculty development have been hard to achieve in the face of the realities that confront most faculty developers. Directors of most college and university programs are administrators, faculty, or staff who must balance their role as faculty developer with their responsibilities as teachers, advisors, scholars, administrators, and participants in the service mission of their campuses. In addition, such positions often demand a number of skills not learned in graduate school—or in other faculty roles. Typically, resources and staff are modest. In most cases directors work in isolation and have few opportunities to exchange ideas and concerns about professional development with others in similar positions, especially outside their own institutions.

Recognizing these difficulties, six faculty developers representing four public and private colleges and universities in a midwestern state came together to share problems faced by directors of faculty and instructional development centers. We identified the lack of avenues for communication and sharing of expertise among faculty developers as a priority concern. Based on our meeting and subsequent conversations, our group decided to organize a conference on faculty development for all public and private college and university faculty developers and administrators in the state.

To address systematically the topics and issues surrounding faculty career development and vitality, we reviewed the literature, consulted with colleagues both around the state and in the field of faculty development, and developed goals and a preliminary plan for the conference.

Goals of the Conference

The state-wide faculty development conference had four major goals. The program addressed the needs of individuals, institutions, and the state and was designed to accomplish the following:

1. To promote the exchange of ideas, practices, and concerns about professional development among college and university faculty developers throughout the state.
2. To create a network for campus administrators and directors of faculty development programs across the state for the purposes of linking and sharing existing resources and skills.
3. To identify and support faculty development opportunities at each college and university in the state.
4. Ultimately, to promote faculty vitality and career development as well as to enhance student learning in higher education.

Ten Tips for State-wide Network Planners

It is difficult to make broad generalizations based on the success of a single conference; faculty developers need to design a program that fits their state or region. Still, it is important to share our best ideas in the hope that thinking about what works in one setting will provoke creative ideas and spin-offs elsewhere. It is in this spirit of cooperation that we offer ten tips for planners of state-wide conferences or networks. (Appendix A provides an overview of our conference.)

1. Establish a State-wide Core Committee

State-wide or regional faculty development initiatives stand a better chance of success if they are coordinated by a core of dedicated and energetic people. One person should be designated to coordinate the effort and to “build a fire” under the core committee. Include individuals who hold diverse viewpoints and positions in their institutions. For example, eight individuals made up our core committee. This core fairly equally represented large state universities, small liberal arts colleges, faculty members, faculty developers, and administrators.

2. Determine a Base of Coordination and Planning

Determining a base to build upon seems to hinge on at least four factors: staffing, resources, geography, and timing. For example, we selected an individual at the large, public research university in the

southern part of the state to head the core committee and conference planning. The selection was based on her experience in conference planning and access to additional staff and resources.

At the same time, we decided that all planning meetings should be held in a location that was equally accessible to all members of the core committee. Similarly, we wanted the conference to take place in a location central in the state so that no campus would be perceived as “owner” of the network. Because the aforementioned research university casts a long shadow, we chose the state’s capital city—the approximate center of the state—as the site for our planning and conference.

Finally, we began planning well ahead of the conference. By our estimates, a state or regional conference requires at least six months of preparation. In terms of timing, we also recommend planners hold their conference early in the academic year (in our case, October). Faculty members are typically “over-conferenced” and not as enthusiastic in April or May.

3. Create Collaborative Systems of Support

Like most state-wide faculty development initiatives, we started with no funding. We decided that before we could ask for support we needed to develop a budget that itemized our needs. We suggest that conference planners consider the following: renting a facility, honorarium, travel and expenses for keynote speakers, food service (meals and coffee breaks), and administrative costs such as mailing and duplicating.

After determining a budget, develop financial support. Send your proposal to government organizations such as the state legislature, private organizations such as a regional endowment or foundation, or participating institutions. In our state, the Lilly Endowment is a strong supporter of faculty development and has been generous to both private and public institutions. We were fortunate that Lilly awarded us a grant sufficient to cover the cost of conference registration, meals, and materials for up to three representatives from each institution. (In the future, however, we would charge a nominal registration or non-refundable meal fee. We found that a few individuals were cavalier about missing the meals). Individuals or their institutions were asked to cover transportation, overnight accommodations, and additional conferees.

If finances are a central concern, there are places where the budget can be cut without sacrificing quality. For example, use a campus meeting place rather than renting another facility. Commission a talented friend (you have many) to be a keynote speaker — perhaps someone owes a favor.

Remind the staff at radio stations and newspapers that the state-wide or regional network is a non-profit operation so that advertising might be free. Use micro-computer graphics and mimeograph or ditto machine instead of offset printing for publicity, mailings, programs, and evaluations. Also, several consortia have augmented their budgets by charging institutions involved in conferences a more substantial registration fee or a yearly membership.

4. Establish Faculty and Administrative Ownership

Studies of faculty development programs point to the importance of both faculty ownership and administrative support (Eble & McKeachie, 1985; Nelson & Siegel, 1980). The planning committee initiated a number of steps to identify interested faculty and administrators. These steps were carefully orchestrated to garner both individual and institutional support for the conference. First, we contacted the chief academic officer of each college and university in the state by letter. We explained the goals of the conference and asked administrators to identify at least three individuals involved in faculty development on their campuses and send us their names. (The concept of campus teams proves wiser than single representatives because individuals in teams are more likely to energize each other and implement ideas back at the home campus.)

Second, we sent a letter to each identified faculty member or administrator, inviting her or him to attend and, if possible, to present a session at the conference. Individuals or campus teams were encouraged to offer an Institutional Action Report, a Workshop, or a Cracker Barrel Round Table (about which more will be said later).

We should note that there was an overwhelming response in both participation levels and enthusiasm. A total of 198 faculty and administrators attended the conference from fifty of the fifty-four colleges and universities in the state. They included faculty members from a range of disciplines; department chairs; deans of faculties, students, and academic affairs; and directors of faculty development programs. Approximately forty of the fifty campuses attending offered presentations.

5. Pay Attention to Details of Conference Planning

It is possible that one of the wisest decisions we made was to pay for the services of a campus conference coordinator. This individual was able to help in developing a realistic budget (it is easy to underestimate program costs), handling registration payments and other financial mat-

ters, selecting and reserving a conference location. We also were able to leave tasks such as AV equipment, signs, and room set-ups to the experts.

For those who must coordinate the conference themselves, we recommend working from a check list for conference planners. A piece by Hilsen and Wadsworth (1988) offers comprehensive and practical advice. Despite the degree of conference support available, do identify one on-site person whose only job is to be sure everything is running smoothly during the program. This “troubleshooter” could be a student who is familiar with AV equipment, who can operate the lighting systems in the building, and who knows where to locate room keys, chalk, paper, pencils, name tags, late registration materials, and phones.

6. Emphasize Local Versus Outside Expertise

We were fortunate to have chosen two excellent outside speakers (carefully selected based on various presenters we had heard). Both speakers provided valuable stimulation and insights, and participants gave them high ratings on the conference evaluation. But our experience suggests that it may not be entirely necessary to bring in luminaries from off-campus. We were at least equally successful in showcasing local talent. As mentioned earlier, in our letter to potential participants we asked individuals to list areas in which they felt they had something to share with others. We then followed up interests by phone and slotted all who volunteered into either Institutional Action Reports, Workshops, or Cracker Barrel Round Tables.

Briefly, the Institutional Action Reports allowed interested teams or individuals to make 15 minute presentations highlighting successful faculty development programs or activities on their campuses. Cracker Barrel Round Tables allowed eight individuals to facilitate discussions on varied issues in faculty development. Finally, eight workshop leaders offered concrete strategies for starting or enriching faculty development programs. Admittedly, the multiple formats translated into complex logistics for us as planners. Still, the participative nature of the conference clearly enhanced the sense of faculty and administrative ownership.

7. Offer a Range of Learning Experiences

Studies show that faculty have different needs at different stages in their careers (Sorcinelli, 1985). In response, we designed a conference that not only had a wide range of formats, but also sessions tailored for faculty, faculty developers, and administrators (e.g., Active Learning in Lecture Settings: Some Practical Lecture Variations, How to Begin a

Teaching Improvement Program, Administrative Leadership in Faculty Development). Further, we offered opportunities for faculty who expressed concerns about teaching, research, personal, and even administrative development (e.g., Alternatives to Lecturing, Developing Research Skills, Fanning the Embers: Calling Forth the Possible, A Dean's Perspective). Finally, there were sessions that spoke to new, mid-career, and senior faculty and to administrators (e.g., Mentors for New Faculty, Pre-Retirement Leaves, Faculty Support Teams).

8. Schedule Time for Informal Contacts

In a desire to offer a rich and full experience to all participants, it is not too difficult to crowd the schedule with activities. But, besides listening to speakers and presenters, most participants expect to meet new people. We scheduled all meals on the conference site to promote informal meetings. In addition, we tried to schedule informal time during meals, coffee breaks, and evening gatherings to allow participants to come together on social as well as intellectual grounds.

9. Ask Participants to Evaluate the Conference

Written evaluations are the basis for generating and improving any follow-up activities. Make sure an evaluation form is available for participants to fill out before they leave; designate a table or box for returns. In terms of concrete and helpful feedback, we found that several open-ended questions worked the best for us. They included: (1) For you, what were the most useful aspects of this conference? (2) What are two or three significant things you learned that you can take back and apply/adapt to your campus? (3) For you, what were the least useful aspects of this conference? (4) What are two or three of your questions or concerns that still are unanswered? (5) Where do we go from here? (6) What do we need to do to move beyond this conference?

10. Set Out Plans for Follow-up Efforts

It is important that the excitement a conference generates not be lost. Our conference planning committee met a month after the program to review evaluations of the conference and to sketch out prospects for the future. We published a synthesis of evaluations (Sorcinelli, 1988) and mailed them to each participant. Other state-wide conferences have mailed proceedings.

Directions for the Future

Our first state-wide faculty development conference was highly successful. Attendance mushroomed beyond our expectations. The program directly involved many faculty and administrators, and participants developed new skills, relationships, and enthusiasm for their work in faculty development. Clearly, the conference addressed a felt need for professional renewal on many campuses in the state. It also identified a network of administrators and faculty members interested in future programs that promote faculty development in its broadest terms. Based on our synthesis of evaluations and our own experiences during and after the conference, we have suggested some possible directions for the future.

1. Sponsor a second state-wide faculty development conference, using concerns, structures, themes, and networks suggested by the first program. To provide sufficient time for preparation, the conference would be planned for two years in the future.
2. Publish a resource booklet that would indicate current programs and contacts on each campus.
3. Organize or facilitate networks among smaller units of faculty and administrators (something less than state-wide, perhaps intrainstitutional activities set out by region or type of college).
4. Identify a group of consultants (e.g., by skill, interest, region, type of institution). Such consultants could be made available to campuses interested in drawing upon outside expertise when developing their own faculty development programs.
5. Identify an individual who would work with an advisory committee to provide faculty development support to individual campuses. Such a faculty member would be supported for two years (release time, travel funds) to assess campus needs, coordinate workshops or other activities, and provide consultation on starting or sustaining faculty development programs. The individual might draw on the resource consultants mentioned in option three. The model would be somewhat similar to a highly successful grant awarded by the Lilly Endowment to the Great Lakes College Association (GLCA) in 1975.

With the state-wide conference, we took an important first step toward promoting faculty career development and vitality in colleges and universities in one midwestern state. Our hope is to take the necessary next steps to continue to encourage and support the many fledgling faculty development programs fanned by the excitement that this first conference sparked.

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Appendix A

Conference Overview

Friday, October 30

9:00-12:00 Registration

10:15 Welcome

Opening Statement

10:45-11:30 **Keynote Address**

Kenneth Eble

University of Utah

Improving Undergraduate Education Through Faculty Development

11:30-12:30 **Audience reaction:** A facilitator will break the audience into small groups to discuss the Keynote Address, and to raise questions and issues for general discussion.

12:30-1:30 Lunch

2:00-3:20 **Institutional Action Reports:** Each Institutional Action Report presentation briefly highlights a successful faculty

development idea, activity, or program. The purpose is to provide a forum for sharing our best ideas. As each presentation is only 15 minutes, questions can be pursued individually during the break or at other free time. There are a total of 24 presentations. A facilitator and eight different Action Reports have been assigned to each of three adjoining rooms. Conferees are encouraged to move back and forth between rooms to hear various presentations offered.

- 3:20-3:40 Break
- 3:40-5:00 **Institutional Action Reports** (cont'd)
- 5:00-6:00 Social Hour/Cash Bar
- 6:00-7:30 Dinner
- 7:30-8:30 **Cracker Barrel Round Tables:** The Cracker Barrel Round Tables offer eight informal discussions on faculty development topics. A presenter will introduce ideas and guide the discussion. At the end of 30 minutes, participants will have the opportunity to move to another discussion topic and table.

Saturday, October 31

- 8:00-8:45 Continental Breakfast
- 9:00-10:15 **Workshops:** The workshops offer eight concurrent sessions on topics such as Administrative Leadership in Faculty Development, Active Learning in Lecture Settings, The Role of Faculty in Student Retention Efforts, Beyond Intuition: A Systematic Approach to Course Improvement, and Revitalizing the Workplace for Liberal Arts Faculty.
- 10:45-12:00 **Workshops** (repeated)
- 12:00-1:00 Lunch
- 1:00-1:45 **Keynote Address:**
 K. Patricia Cross
 Harvard Graduate School of Education
Circles, Cycles, and Spirals In the Reform of Higher Education
- 1:45-2:45 **Audience Reaction:** Facilitator will break audience into small groups to discuss Keynote Address, and raise questions and issues for general discussion.
- 1:45-2:45 Evaluation and Closure