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1991

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*To Improve the Academy*. 223.

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# Nine Keys to Enhancing Campus Wide Influence of Faculty Development Centers

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For faculty development centers (FDCs), the next few years may be the most crucial yet. The stage has been set for increased commitment to teaching: AAHE national conferences have emphasized instruction, and lawmakers and college guide writers have indicted research-driven institutions for paying insufficient attention to teaching. The presidents of Harvard and Stanford have recently urged increased emphasis on teaching, and other college presidents are jumping on the bandwagon.

More money and power will likely go to faculty development, which, in turn, will attract a school of sharks ready to fight for devouring rights to that money and power. FDCs will have to deal with deans and department chairs, many of whom will insist that they know best how to generate instructional improvement in their schools. And they will be able to summon support from such big fish as Carnegie Foundation President, Ernest Boyer, Stanford Professor, Lee Shulman, and AAHE President, Russ Edgerton.

Like all decisions on college campuses, the choice of who will control new faculty development money will be based both on merit and political clout. Of course, FDCs must place program quality ahead of political gain. An FDC that pursues political chits to the detriment of program quality will be perceived for what it is, and will shrivel in influence. But FDCs must also ensure that their achievements and requests receive full consideration from campus leaders. This article will offer suggestions for how to ensure this.

These ideas represent a combination of what one author has found effective in his consulting work at a number of colleges and universities, and what the other author has found useful while helping to build the Office of Instructional Development at the University of Georgia. During this author's ten years as Director of the Office, its budget has grown from less than \$100,000 to over four times that amount, and it has moved from cramped quarters to a brand-new, custom-designed, 4,000 square foot office building.

## **Enhancing the Influence of FDCs**

If the authors were to assume co-directorship of a new FDC, we would take the following steps to maximize our political status:

### **1. Report to the top**

An FDC director should attempt to report to the most credible, influential person possible. At small colleges, we would try for the president, and at larger institutions, the provost or vice president for academic affairs. If an FDC director is unable to report to the top person, our second choice would be the person who reports to the top person. So, if the top person is the vice president for academic affairs, the FDC director should attempt to report to the associate vice president for academic affairs rather than, for example, to the vice president for business services. The office of academic affairs typically has more money and power than other units and is viewed as controlling the central function of the institution: academics. By reporting to an academic affairs administrator, the FDC is more likely to be perceived as central to the operation of the institution and to have closer access to the people with the most power and money within the institution.

### **2. Give due credit to the boss**

Because the boss is probably responsible for most of the FDC's resources, he or she deserves credit for achievements. For example, a newsletter's masthead might include "A service of the Office of Instructional Development under the auspices of the Vice President for Academic Affairs." At FDC events such as workshops, retreats, opening sessions of T.A. training, and teaching award ceremonies, we would invite our boss to speak, make an introduction, or present an award. We would introduce him or her as the person who made the event possible. In short, when there is joy to be shared, let the boss partake of it. After all, your boss is the reason you exist in the first place.

### **3. Help the boss solve problems**

For example, the boss is frequently asked for money. Deciding whom to fund is time-consuming and can make enemies. So, an FDC director might offer to administer some money allocated for faculty development by constituting a committee of respected deans, department chairs, and faculty plus the FDC director to make the funding decisions. Volunteering for this task relieves the boss of a potentially odious activity while increasing the FDC's influence—the office becomes a source of funds. One FDC director said, "You can't do business on an empty wagon."

Another easy but visible way to help your boss is to offer to write the many instruction-related letters that must be written: for example, congratulations to teaching award winners, and letters of welcome to new faculty and teaching assistants. The FDC should be a problem solver, not a problem maker.

### **4. Give things away**

Once some projects are developed, it may be wise to give the rights to run these to someone else on campus, ideally a powerful administrator or leader, such as a dean or faculty senate officer. There is both a substantive and political reason for this. An FDC should be a creator of programs, not necessarily a maintainer. In addition, giving things away may pay dividends later when support is needed for new ideas.

### **5. Involve faculty in your efforts**

Faculty should be involved in planning specific FDC efforts and as members of an FDC advisory committee. After all, FDCs exist to serve faculty. When faculty input is sought up-front, programs are more likely to meet faculty needs and to engender a sense of ownership which will subsequently help in disseminating the program to others.

Apart from these substantive reasons for involving faculty, remember also that faculty can be biased against administrators and non-professor types, especially those who have not progressed up the academic ladder. So, an FDC's credibility can be enhanced by involving faculty in its efforts.

### **6. Build relationships with other campus leaders**

Early on, the FDC director should meet individually with deans, key department chairs, and faculty, to identify current faculty development efforts, resources, and needs. Where possible, the director should offer

programs to meet those needs, sharing credit for the program's development with all those who were consulted.

Special efforts should be made to develop partnerships with potential competitors. Cooperation can be more beneficial than competition. For example, an FDC can often join forces with the computer or media center to enhance the quality of both office's products: FDC efforts can make fuller use of technology while computer/media center efforts can incorporate the expertise of the FDC.

Priority might also be given to projects with campus-wide impact (for example, items 7 and 8) and to projects with units headed by someone who could be an effective cheerleader for the FDC.

## **7. Publish a "must have" newsletter**

A quarterly or monthly newsletter filled with compelling features is a superb ongoing advertisement for an FDC. Consider including features like:

- a. The faculty time-saver of the month
- b. Grants available from the institution
- c. Important events to attend
- d. The teaching tip of the month
- e. Other resources available for faculty—even, perhaps, a restaurant of the month, wherein a local restaurant popular with faculty agrees to offer a "two-fer" coupon in the newsletter.

## **8. Sponsor nurturing activities**

Faculty and administrators appreciate efforts to nurture their human side. For example, by sponsoring weekly TGIF get togethers, an FDC provides an ongoing reminder to the entire faculty and staff of the FDC's commitment to improving their quality of life. Similar benefits are derived from a "Just for You" bag lunch seminar series with topics like, "The Faculty Spouse" and "Looking Toward Retirement?"

## **9. Don't act like an empire builder**

Obviously, the bigger an FDC's budget, the greater its power and influence. But, rather than always asking for new programs, offer to fold into your office existing campus programs that aren't going well. Also, as mentioned earlier, build partnerships with other campus units. Potential candidates are computer-based instruction, media services, faculty recreational programs, and even tutoring or mentoring programs. The thing to

remember is that you are there to help faculty, not compete with them for resources.

## **Summary**

The success of an FDC rests upon administrative support, faculty enthusiasm, and campus-wide credibility. The spirit of this article is that instead of building monuments to your office or yourself, try to make other people look good. If you can do this, through high quality work that really benefits the faculty and the institution, your rewards will follow.