



Professional Development Issues for Community Colleges

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North Shore Community College (NSCC) is a two-year institution with campuses in Danvers, Beverly, and Lynn, Massachusetts. A primary focus of our current strategic plan concerns academic programs and curriculum and the institution's commitment to teaching and learning. We plan to renew and expand NSCC's program, curriculum, and learning opportunities in response to educational and labor needs through relevant curriculum with new constructs for delivery; liberal arts courses, transfer courses, and programs that emphasize critical-thinking skills; incorporation of technology into teaching and learning; institutional structure with a full range of workforce development services; and comprehensive education that embraces civic involvement and community. Faculty development is vital to achieve these goals at NSCC, as well as to facilitate student learning.

This article will address the challenges of providing effective professional development in a community college setting. While this is not meant to be a comprehensive list of challenges and solutions, this discussion will touch upon issues that are representative of the faculty development challenges faced by my community college colleagues.

Successful Community College Professional Development Models

The range of faculty development offerings at North Shore Community College is rich and varied. Our professional development efforts begin with monthly two-hour faculty/staff meetings. For the 2007–8 academic year there have been a variety of suggested topics for

meetings, including discussions on campus security in the wake of the Virginia Tech tragedy, technology, teaching learning-challenged students, cross-campus communication, service learning, co-ops and internships, civility in the classroom and on the Internet, information literacy and research, “the greening of the college,” advising, student retention, improving reading and writing in classes, common reading projects, and rubrics.

There is also an ongoing yearlong seminar for new full-time faculty offered through the Center for Teaching Learning and Assessment (CTLA). Throughout the year, faculty will discuss the resources and services available through the CTLA, such as advising, the library, academic technology, and disability services. The seminar meets twice in the fall and twice in the spring. Although attendance to the seminar is not mandatory, all new faculty are expected to participate. We've also instituted a voluntary adjunct faculty seminar on teaching and learning and what it means to be a North Shore faculty member. The seminar for adjuncts is offered online by the assistant dean of liberal studies. At our college, we make a special effort to offer professional development sessions in the evenings, on weekends, and online to accommodate the schedules of the full- and part-time faculty.

Through the Center for Teaching, Learning and Assessment, faculty are encouraged to attend conferences related to teaching and learning, sponsored by national organizations and regional groups. Faculty are also encouraged to attend conferences in their individual disciplines.



Professional Day, a faculty-run and attended event offered once in the spring of each year, is another venue for professional development for faculty and professional staff. In recent years topics have included program review and diversity. In a 2007 survey of faculty and staff, the suggestion list for Professional Day yielded a range of topics that was broad and diverse. These topics were influenced by staff input as well as faculty interest.

Faculty must gain a basic understanding of the mission, vision, and operations of the college as part of their learning process.

The Technology Across the Curriculum (TAC) program at NSCC stimulates and nurtures innovative ideas from faculty and professional staff that employ technology in support of teaching and learning. It is an opportunity to learn about how technology can be applied to individual courses. Faculty learn about online courses, hybrids, Webcasts, and other instructional designs.

For more than twenty years, the NSCC Writing Across the Curriculum program (WAC) has promoted the use of writing to improve student learning across the disciplines. The program has served as a professional development opportunity for individual faculty members, and as an instructional resource for the entire college community. The WAC Program provides up-to-date writing guidelines and offers brown-bag work-

shops on specific writing topics, such as the writing process, grading, researching and documenting, and maintaining writing standards. WAC also provides one-on-one consultation on all faculty concerns, from designing effective assignments to handling specific writing problems. Overall, WAC strives to help teachers help students become better learners. In the process, faculty learn more about good writing. NSCC also has a professional development commit-

tee operated by faculty and staff that distributes small grants for participation in career enhancement and personal growth sessions. Proposals are submitted and reviewed in an ongoing, cyclical manner. Faculty may also apply for fellowships to the Community College Leadership Academy (CCLA), a training program for leaders at New England community colleges. A separate review committee, including the vice president of human resources and the president and CCLA, looks at applications and makes awards. Faculty and staff can pursue educational, professional, and personal development without the burden of added expenses.

Designing a Professional Development Program for a Community College

Unlike faculty at four-year schools, where symposia, colloquia, and seminars within

an academic discipline are the center of the professional development agenda, the needs of the community college faculty are different. Therefore, the topics we must address include not only the educational and academic, but also those related to personal growth and teaching. Topics include not only presentations on poetry, short stories, and essays, but also information on institutional data. Sample topics in professional development sessions at our school included student enrollment and retention rates, advising, teaching first-generation students, diversity, and assessment.

At NSCC, there are specific learning goals and outcomes for faculty professional development. The learning outcomes for faculty are developed from topics related to the progress of the college. Many faculty must gain a basic understanding of the mission, vision, and operations of the college as part of their learning process. Much of their teaching is interdisciplinary and broad in scope. Because of the emphasis on teaching and learning, many community colleges concentrate their efforts on developing core general education outcomes such as written communication, quantitative reasoning, information literacy, and so on. Faculty are required to teach with more innovation and creativity. In addition to general education, however, the curricula at many community colleges also include—in addition to academic disciplines such as history, math, and English—career and professional programs like nursing, environmental technology, and paralegal studies. Faculty out-



comes must focus on building new knowledge, skills, and abilities for teaching in these fields as well as addressing issues such as writing business plans, filling out job applications, and thinking critically about business situations. Workshops on teaching as well as learning as a process, identity, and profession are all important parts of the professional development process.

The learning outcomes might include the ability to identify aspects of the career professions or academic disciplines; understand the structure, function, and operation of each department, program, division and college; find new skills to improve teaching; and develop awareness of ways to promote wellness and personal growth.

Challenges and Solutions

There are several challenges in facing professional development for full- and part-time faculty. Barriers to involvement in professional development at a community college for full-time faculty include

- Faculty workload of five courses plus advising and community service raises questions about when faculty can fit it into their schedules;
- Meeting time is difficult to fit into teaching schedules. Faculty members who must attend a meeting and cannot find someone to cover their course are left with few options;
- Cost to attend conferences can be prohibitive, especially if the college does not reimburse for travel, meals and/or transportation;

- Compensation or stipends for attending a session are not always available, making it impractical for faculty to attend professional development sessions;
- Over the course of a year, there may be multiple opportunities to attend a conference or workshop. Having multiple options and then deciding which session to attend can be complicated and confusing.

Some of the challenges for part-time faculty include

- Part-time faculty are often not integrated into the life of the college and therefore they are not aware of professional development offerings;
- They are not on college e-mail or the regular phone system, so it can be difficult to reach them;
- They don't receive the college newsletter;
- Many of the faculty work full- or part-time in another career, and scheduling sessions can be difficult. Part-time faculty in career programs are likely to be professionals chefs, stylists, or landscape architects, with little experience teaching.

Despite the challenges community colleges face, their faculty members are eager to engage in professional development activities. Through such workforce development seminars and workshops, North Shore Community College faculty have gained key strategies and skills, enabling them to provide a range of innovative learning opportunities for students. ■

AAC&U CALENDAR

In addition to its annual meeting, AAC&U offers a series of working conferences and institutes each year. Additional information about the upcoming meetings listed below is available online at www.aacu.org/meetings.

Annual Meeting

January 23–26, 2008

Intentional Learning, Unscripted Challenges

Knowledge and Imagination for an
Interdependent World
Washington, DC

Network for Academic Renewal Meetings

February 21–23 2008

Integrative Designs for General Education and Assessment

Boston, Massachusetts

April 10–12, 2008

Discovering, Integrating, and Applying Knowledge

Austin, Texas

Summer Institutes

May 30–June 4 2008

Institute on General Education

Minneapolis, Minnesota

June 18–22, 2008

Greater Expectations Institute

Snowbird, Utah