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## **Utilizing Foundation Professors as a Resource to Enhance Faculty Development**

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*By organizing faculty who have attained the new rank of Foundation Professor into a society, a Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) at a regional comprehensive university was able to utilize the group as a valuable resource to enhance the institution's faculty development program in numerous meaningful ways. As Foundation Professors have attained excellence in teaching and scholarship at our institution, these outstanding faculty members are in an ideal position to share their experience, expertise, and knowledge to develop faculty at all levels. In this article, the authors share their experience designing CTL programming that enlisted the expertise of these excellent faculty.*

### **Introduction**

In these days of increasing pressures to perform and dwindling funds, Centers for Teaching and Learning (CTLs) need to cultivate every resource in order to achieve vibrant faculty development programming. After a survey of 971 managers and frontline faculty and staff at colleges and universities, Academic Impressions' *The State of Professional Development in Higher Education 2016* claimed that CTLs need to raise the professional development bar: "you will need ideas, fresh perspectives, and examples of how other institutions have innovated, and you need to seek these ideas outside the walls of your own institution" (p. 5). In *Innovating Faculty Development: Entering the Age of Innovation* (2016), we summed up the same need with, "In short, innovation in faculty development is mandatory not only for surviving, but also

thriving” (p. viii). In *Creating the Future of Faculty Development: Learning From the Past, Understanding the Present* (2006), Sorcinelli, Austin, Eddy, and Beach proclaimed faculty developers were living in the Age of the Network wherein campuses should be scanned for possible collaborations. In a recent follow-up, *Faculty Development in the Age of Evidence: Current Practices, Future Imperatives* (2016), Beach, Sorcinelli, Austin, and Rivard report that, “Faculty members are finding ways to self-organize the kind of support they feel they need” and “faculty developers are addressing the institutional needs and priorities through linkages, collaborations, and networks across institutional units” (pp. 11-13). As our current institution appears to be one of those being described by the research, we were innovative and proactive to organize and utilize what for us has become a valuable resource, the Society of Foundation Professors (SFP).

## **Background**

While most institutions have a tripartite set of ranks wherein a hire advances from assistant professor to associate professor to full professor, our university, like a few others, realized that a fourth, still higher rank, the Foundation Professor, provided faculty with something to aspire to after a successful ten-year climb to a full professorship, especially those professors who stayed in teaching and research rather than transitioning into the campus administration. The University of Central Florida has done something similar with their Pegasus Professors. Other institutions also honor high-achieving faculty. For example, the University of Vermont offers a University Distinguished Professor Program, and the University of Colorado provides Distinguished Professorships.

As our campus website The Society of Foundation Professors (2017) notes, “In 1987 the Eastern Kentucky University Foundation established a program to recognize ‘creative, self-motivated exemplars’ of the ideal college professor.” After five years in the full professor rank, all full-time tenured faculty became eligible for “the two-year professorship which comes with an extra salary stipend of \$5,000 a year.” Criteria were developed in detail, and a selection committee was created to ensure only the very best scholar-teachers were chosen.

By fall 2006, the number of Foundation Professors had swollen to 43 faculty members—some who had retired but more who still taught—and while the university made good on its promised stipends, it had not been able to find a use beyond recognition for this group. That same year two of us, Hal

and Charlie, were appointed co-directors of the Teaching & Learning Center. The two were selected because they were starting to publish in the field of faculty development, each had won the state's prestigious Acorn Award, which is given to the best professor in the Commonwealth of Kentucky, and, most importantly, both were Foundation Professors.

Hal and Charlie came up with the idea of organizing the Foundation Professors into a useful entity for the university; so, with the help of two other interested professors, they called the group together, solicited for it a name—the Society of Foundation Professors (SFP)—helped write its bylaws, and even regularized the selection process. They agreed to have the CTL unit sponsor the organization, and they functioned as its cofacilitators, running three meetings and an induction dinner each year for the first ten years of its existence. They were also able to convince the university administration to provide it a budget.

Most importantly, the three of us figured out various ways to tie the SFP to our job on campus, faculty development (Rusty directs the unit to which the Teaching & Learning Center is allied, the Noel Studio for Academic Creativity), through the SFP Bylaws' Objective 2: "to serve as a campus voice for excellence in teaching, scholarship/creative activities, and service." We also aligned the SFP with the first item on the university's strategic plan: "Enhance faculty professional development opportunities with a focus on developing skills and engaging students through high-impact learning strategies, including metacognition skills, teaching techniques, curriculum design, and providing customer-focused service to all" (EKU, 2015, 1.1.1).

While many campuses might honor their outstanding and successful faculty with prestigious titles, we argue that these faculty are valuable assets to the core academic functions of the institution. As such, they have a highly sought-after knowledge base and skills that can benefit all faculty on campus.

### **Application #1: Developing Teaching and Learning Innovations/ Roundtable Presenters**

For the past eleven years, our CTL programmed a series of workshops throughout the semester that has gone by various names, such as Roundtables. The current iteration that focuses on pedagogical enhancement is called the Teaching & Learning Innovation series. Having been recognized

by a university-wide committee for their achievements, the Foundation Professors seemed a natural fit as facilitators of these sessions. We provided some training and some online information to aid these session facilitators.

Borrowing from Ken Bain's (2004) title, we also established an annual spring event called "What the Best Teachers Do." For our panel discussion, each year we rotated four or five Foundation Professors, who detailed some of the insights that had helped them reach that rank. The session not only inspired members of the audience to employ proven strategies, but to emulate the presenters in order to become Foundation Professors themselves.

### **Application #2: Utilizing Faculty Members**

The university has an uneven mentoring program for new faculty. Some do it by college, some by department, and some new faculty fall through the cracks. We decided to establish an alternative mentoring system whereby Foundation Professors took new faculty under their wings, offering a first semester of knowledge and guidance.

Part of New Faculty Orientation has always been a Resource Fair, wherein various units from around campus—from Parking to AAUP—set up tables and provide the new faculty with quick introductions to their services. The Foundation Professors followed suit, establishing a mentor table. New faculty, especially those who failed to find mentoring available on either the department or college level, were invited to sign up. Later, we matched the newbies with Foundation Professors who seem best suited. Interestingly, some new faculty, fearful of local politics, asked for a mentor from outside their area.

### **Application #3: Creating and Facilitating Alumni Programming**

At the end of New Faculty Orientation, the new faculty have a lunch sponsored by colleagues from Advancement and Alumni Affairs, who use this time to explain what they do. In an era where regional comprehensives each year lose another portion of their legislative funding, alumni donations are solicited to close the gap. We were asked if we could think of any programming that could build closer ties between the alumni and the university from which they graduated.

One solution became “Memories of EKU,” a panel discussion on spring’s Alumni Weekend facilitated by an experienced Foundation Professor with others on the panel. One such Foundation Professor on the panel was the President of the University. Foundation Professor reminiscences stimulated the alumni to extract their own fond memories. Another product was the “If It Weren’t for Professor X . . .” column the Foundation Professors started for the alumni magazine. The Foundation Professors primed the pump with example columns, and suddenly alumni began submitting their own memories and donations. Those donations aided faculty development as the next usage explains.

#### **Application #4: Creating the Rowlett Faculty Development Award**

Since the University Foundation was providing the funding for the Foundation Scholarship program, the Society of Foundation Professors decided to set up a fundraising program that directly contributed to faculty development. Two Foundation Professors approached the family of a former Provost who had written them about the desire to honor their father’s memory. As the father, Provost (although most of the time he was called an associate vice president) Rowlett, had always supported improving “the quality of instruction” and had been instrumental in helping a former president of the university develop the Foundation Professor concept, we decided to create a Rowlett Faculty Development Award and aid in the fundraising.

The family provided seed money, and the Rowlett Faculty Development Award was launched. Each year, faculty with a professional development project in mind can apply. A committee of Foundation Professors examines the applications and awards various sums for the projects deemed most worthwhile. In addition, the SFP aided the University Foundation in soliciting donations for the fund by sending out personalized appeals.

#### **Application #5: Sponsoring Scholars Week and Creating and Judging a Graduate Poster Showcase**

Since the Society of Foundation Professors was provided with a small budget, they found an excellent way to return that money to the university. They began by sponsoring a distinguished scholar to kick off Scholars Week

in April. Various Foundation Professors also sat on the selection board. Another year for Scholars Week, a Foundation Professor created a Faculty Poster Showcase that billboarded those faculty who had published a book in the previous year and provided them with a small stipend for their accomplishment.

To encourage graduate student participation in Scholars Week, one Foundation Professor brought up the notion of having a Graduate Poster Showcase to highlight the collaboration and mentoring that occurs between graduate students and graduate faculty. With the Showcase established, we decided to add the element of a contest. A rubric was created, Foundation Professors served as judges for the event, and the SFP presented certificates to the winners.

### **Application #6: Inviting Current SFP Members to be Faculty Innovators**

Two years ago, our CTL created the Faculty Innovators (FIs) as a faculty outreach program. Through a consultation with deans and chairs, one FI was chosen from each of the five colleges for a two-year term, and later the library agreed to support one FI from its staff. FIs provide consultations and classroom observations for the colleges and departments. For the CTL, they serve as professional learning community facilitators, presenters in our Teaching & Learning Innovations series, and creators and mentors in our online professional development program, Developing Excellence in Eastern's Professors (DEEP).

Running the FIs is an Executive Committee consisting of the three of us and the FI Coordinator. When an FI in the College of Health Sciences retired, with the dean we selected Shirley, who is also a Foundation Professor, as the new FI. When our current FI coordinator's two-year term ended, we appointed her as FI Coordinator. That choice means the Executive Committee now consists of three Foundation Professors. As the program moves forward, we are looking to fill FI vacancies with more Foundation Professors.

### **Application #7: Utilizing SFP Members as Developers and Mentors of DEEP**

In the previous application, we mentioned our online professional development system, DEEP. Currently, we have created five courses for DEEP,

and each course consists of four levels that roughly correspond to the revised Bloom's taxonomy. The second course created for DEEP, Foundations of Pedagogy, was developed by two Foundation Professors, who had written a book on the subject. The two FPs also serve as course mentors, reading and scoring participants' submissions. Another Foundation Professor is currently co-developing a course on the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). When this course goes live, she will act as the course mentor.

If the DEEP system continues to add five courses per year, more FIs and Foundation Professors will be needed to create and mentor them. In addition, we would like to rotate FIs in and out of the courses to prevent burnout.

### **Application #8: Using Foundation Professors to Develop and Facilitate New Faculty Orientation and Summer Bridge**

Our basic organizing principle that helps us promote iteration over mere one-shot opportunities is the institution's milestone events, major events in professional development that involve large segments of the campus population (i.e., New Faculty Orientation, the Provost's Professional Development Speaker Series, the Faculty Leadership Institute, Scholars Week, and Pedagogicon). One of the most common services a CTL provides is New Faculty Orientation, where, as mentioned, we used Foundation Professors as mentors. The next step was employing three Foundation Professors as facilitators during the three-day event. Doing so provided a way for our new faculty to get to know them and vice versa.

Gradually, our CTL has taken over professional development of other campus teaching groups. This summer, we made use of Foundation Professors to help present and observe the faculty in Summer Bridge, a program aimed at aiding students arriving with need of developmental courses to overcome high school deficiencies.

### **Application #9: Crafting and Facilitating a Faculty Scholars Institute**

Foundation Professors have achieved an outstanding scholarly record of publication and presentation. They are distinguished in their fields, amassing a large number of prestigious scholarly publications during their time as faculty at our institution. They've served as leaders in their respective fields

through the creation of scholarly and creative works. Thus, the Foundation Professors are in an ideal position to mentor faculty as they pursue success in scholarly production in their own careers.

Foremost, all faculty need mentorship in their scholarly and creative pursuits. Any faculty member who has submitted work to major journals has experienced rejection (most quite frequently). Major journals are becoming increasingly selective. Foundation Professors can offer their perspectives for drafting successful manuscripts and seeing them through to publication, even when that process requires multiple revisions and submission to multiple journals. This focus inspired the newly formed Faculty Scholars Institute at our institution (to be held next spring), focused on guiding tenure-track faculty through publication, including identifying multiple publication venues for scholarly work, a daunting process for many new (and experienced) faculty. The Foundation Professors offer many valuable perspectives as faculty pursue scholarly achievement:

- Junior faculty scholarly mentoring;
- Manuscript feedback and review;
- Submission and revision guidance; and
- Journal and scholarly venue analysis.

Many faculty excel at service and teaching, while others are more persistent at sending their written work for peer review. Many faculty will benefit from the support of Foundation Professors—with expertise and a proven track record of scholarship—in the process of identifying publication venues, revise and resubmits, and analysis of publication outlets.

### **Application #10: Placing Foundation Professors in Leadership Roles**

As mentioned, we already have a Foundation Professor serving as the coordinator of our Faculty Innovators (FI) and three on our FI Executive Board. Every January we hold a Faculty Leadership Institute where, unfortunately, we are not currently employing Foundation Professors. We are now seeking ways to use them on some of the panels where various aspects of leadership are discussed.

## **Assembling Evidence**

We are in the process of refining instruments used to assess Foundation Professor programming. At this point, we have surveyed all Foundation Professors being used in professional development, and to a person they were positive about their involvement, with their only complaints being along the lines of “What took the University so long to figure out how to make effective use of us?” Moreover, faculty development participation rates continue to increase each year. We attribute these increases to better uses of the expertise available on campus, including the Foundation Professors. On our campus, faculty have logged a 99.75-hour increase in their participation from academic year 2015-2016 to 2016-2017 in teaching-related faculty development programming. Foundation Professors contribute to both the quality and quantity of faculty development initiatives offered through our CTL.

## **Conclusions**

In short, the Society of Foundation Professors program provides a built-in feeder system of excellence for faculty development and can offer your institution, especially the CTL, many advantages:

1. If your institution has a Foundation Professor rank, organizing these scholars into a group that reports to your CTL would allow them to contribute directly to faculty development programming and initiatives.
2. If your institution doesn't have a Foundation Professor, help the school create such a rank to ensure that all faculty can benefit from their experience and expertise. Basic information can be found at our website in the References section.
3. The Society of Foundation Professors program offers the advantage of an alignment of key stakeholders—academics, alumni, and advancement. Your institution's strategic plan can be a point of departure for such alignment.
4. We have merely started finding excellent uses for Foundation Professors with our Top Ten Applications. Each year, we discover another way to use Foundation Professors, and we're certain you can adjust our list to fit your institution.

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