Sweet, C., Blythe, H., Carpenter, R., & Cecil, T. (2018). Approaching the Holy Grail of faculty development: Evolving a CTL from a service-oriented organization to a learning-assessment unit. *Journal on Centers for Teaching and Learning*, *10*, 45-58.

Approaching the Holy Grail of Faculty Development: Evolving a CTL from a Service-Oriented Organization to a Learning-Assessment Unit

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The Holy Grail of faculty development has always been for a Center of Teaching & Learning (CTL) to demonstrate that its programming brings about a change in faculty learning that, in turn, results in increased or deep student learning. Our CTL's journey has taken us through three of the distinct "Ages" as labelled by Beach, Sorcinelli, and Austin (2016), wherein we encountered and overcame various perils. Ultimately, we arrived at a solution for faculty development programming, DEEP, an online system of courses that is accessible by all faculty at all times and, most importantly, offers a glimmer that the Grail of improved learning by faculty first and then students is within our grasp.

Introduction

DEEP was the product of an eight-year quest through three stages of faculty development, wherein we made more wrong turns than Percival. As the vision and mission of our university has changed to focus on teaching and learning alongside faculty development (FD), so has the CTL's mission and programming. During this progression, our CTL, like many others, has essentially evolved through three distinct stages from what Beach, Sorcinelli, and Austin (2016) called the Age of the Learner to the Age of the Network

and finally to the Age of Evidence, or what is alternately called the Age of Innovation (Sweet, Blythe, & Carpenter, 2016). Most importantly, in the third age, this journey has led us to finally develop DEEP, a unique mode of instruction for faculty learning outcomes as well as an innovative assessment of student learning instrument.

The First Age: Age of the Learner

From 2008-2011, the CTL functioned as a service-oriented organization with the main purpose of publicizing information about the university's major services to support faculty and students. Beach et al. described this stage as the Age of the Learner, wherein "Many centers focused on assisting instructors to understand underlying theories of learning and to expand their repertoire of skills and strategies" (p. 5). Here, we developed a loose series of programs called Roundtables, wherein faculty heard through the lecture method (often aided by mundane PowerPoints) about such student-oriented services as the Counselling Center, the Office of Services for Individuals with Disabilities, the Co-op Program; some faculty support (e.g., Grants and Research, Institutional Research, Academic Integrity); and even the President's and Provost's Fireside Chats. Research on the CTL was nil, and the assessment was simple: just ascertain the number of attendees as well as survey their satisfaction—the number one and number two Data Collection Methods at this stage listed by Beach et al. (2016)—then record the data in TracDat, the automated data collection platform chosen by the university's Institutional Research Office. While our CTL also sponsored faculty learning communities, occasional workshops, and even faculty reading and discussion groups called Breakfast and a Book, using the same two assessment tools, our CTL's main programming was reaching about 30% of the faculty members. Significantly, faculty awareness of skills and strategies, not faculty learning**,** was our focus.

The Second Age: Age of the Network

In 2011, our focus transitioned to documenting every activity that occurred under our aegis. Beach et al. claim the Age of the Network required "greater collaborative efforts among stakeholders such as libraries, teaching centers, instructional technology units, and assessment offices as well as academic departments and colleges" (p. 6). As a means of semi-assessment, our CTL developed the Weekly Activities Report, which was emailed to the

Dean every Friday morning (Sweet, Blythe, Keeley, & Forsyth, 2009). For the report, we created a template of our unit's strategic plan, and under each item (e.g., "The CTL will provide scholarship opportunities") were listed the relevant activities our CTL produced that week (e.g., "The CTL facilitated a Breakfast and a Book on Bok's *Our Underachieving Colleges"*). At the end of the year, assessment still consisted of the number of attendees, surveys on their satisfaction, and the percentage of faculty reached.

While, admittedly, our primary programming was still mainly composed of one-shots in fall 2014, by the spring of 2015 we began experimenting by creating core learning threads, topics focused on priority areas of faculty growth, areas derived both from the university's strategic plan and what our research deemed important for faculty development—i.e., pedagogy (e.g., metacognition), scholarship (with an emphasis on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning), technology, creativity/innovation, and diversity. That academic year, for instance, at the Provost's request, the CTL themed the pedagogic idea of metacognition. Through the Provost's Professional Development Speaker Series, the CTL, which actually administers the Provost's program, brought metacognitive expert Saundra McGuire to campus to provide workshops for both students and faculty. In coordination, as part of the newly-instituted Teaching & Learning Innovations Series (about 15 active-learning workshops/semester), the CTL also offered four separate workshops (two in the fall, two in the spring) on metacognitive strategies, using the final one to sum up all that McGuire and the programming had covered. Significantly, preceding her appearance, the CTL ran a professional learning community (PLC) centered on her *Teaching Students How To Learn* (2015). In short, the PLC introduced the core learning thread, the Provost's Speaker Series explored the practical aspects of the concept, and the workshops provided repeated opportunities for the faculty to retrieve and apply the information. This new approach resulted in the CTL reaching almost half the faculty.

Our purpose in this second stage of programming was to provide some deep learning for the faculty. While many definitions of deep learning exist, we adopted that of Millis (2010): "Deep learning leads to a genuine understanding that promotes long-term retention of the learned material and, just as important, the ability to retrieve it and apply it to new problems in unfamiliar concepts" (p. 1). We changed our unit's motto from "Helping Teachers Help Students Learn" to "Helping Teachers Help Students Learn Deeply" and tried to build in several deep learning opportunities, as the research sug-

gested that our previous single-event programming did not work well. Gormally, Evans, and Brickman (2014) had discovered the ineffectiveness of one-shots: "We know effective dissemination of evidence-based teaching practices requires more intensive training than a one-time workshop can offer" (Sunal et al., 2001; Dancy & Henderson, 2010; Singer et al., 2012)" (p. 188). As the CTL focused more on faculty learning, our creation of the Teaching & Learning Innovations series was strongly influenced by Brown, Roediger, and McDaniel (2014), who authored a book on the science of learning. According to their *Make It Stick*, the foundation of learning involves retrieval, so we created a series of workshops that encouraged participants to pull old knowledge from memory, for, "practicing retrieval makes learning stick far better than re-exposure to the original material does" (p. 28). The core learning threads were the main topics the faculty needed. Only through repeated retrieval of concepts related to these core learning threads during workshops would faculty have a chance at deep learning. "Multiple sessions of retrieval practice," argue Brown, Roediger, and McDaniel, "are generally better than one," especially if the sessions are spaced out (p. 32), and this spaced retrieval results in what they call consolidation or the "process of strengthening these mental representations for long-term memory" (p. 73).

Nonetheless, while metacognition with five spaced instructional opportunities for learning was the most repeated core learning thread, we could never be certain of its learning effect, deep or otherwise. Why? When for assessment purposes, questionnaires were sent to the 350+ participants, the CTL received almost none back (the n was so small as to be meaningless). We needed a better way to control the assessment.

The Third Age: Age of Evidence/Age of Innovation

We coined the phrase Age of Innovation because, as we point out in *Innovating Faculty Development: Entering the Age of Innovation* (Sweet, Blythe, & Carpenter, 2016), "the basic nature of a new field is change" (p. 4), which is sustained through innovative faculty development. "Innovate or perish has been our unofficial motto" (p. 5). During a restructuring in 2016, our focus shifted again. While the CTL's purpose didn't officially change, the university placed a greater reliance on assessment and evidence, which necessitated our providing proof that the faculty member learned something in the faculty development program and that that knowledge promoted student learning. To be precise, Strategic Goal #1 of the university's new 2015-2020 strategic plan, "to ensure outstanding student learning outcomes," was to be

achieved first by Strategic Initiative 1.1.1: "Enhance faculty professional development 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" (Eastern Kentucky University, 2018).

At that point, we realized the necessity of devising a better system of reaching faculty as well as a way of capturing not just participation or satisfaction, but also student learning, especially that learning related to the faculty member's instructional strategies changed by our programming. Our dream was that faculty learning outcomes should be created and measured as if part of a course in faculty development. More importantly, the low rate of faculty participation both at actual events and in the assessment process had to be confronted and raised.

The challenge was to provide a high-value, low-cost development program that could be proven to work within the time constraints of faculty carrying heavy teaching and service loads (retiring faculty were often replaced with instructors, who contractually owed the university no service or professional development, which in turn put more pressure on fewer full-time faculty to pick up the service load, especially on committees). Our solution was quite innovative: blend technology with pedagogy to design a system that would allow us to take content to the faculty through the use of a virtual environment.

Significantly, the solution provided an opportunity to refute a common charge leveled against CTLs. According to the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, *Policies and Practices to Support Undergraduate Teaching Improvement* (Pallus, Neumann, & Campbell, 2017), CTLs have not developed an effective method of assessing whether their programming for faculty actually affects student learning:

> However, little is known about whether student learning does actually improve at the institution level in response to the accountability efforts. Institutions that adopt such assessments report increased faculty understanding of assessment, but there is little evidence that *student learning* increases or improves as a result. (p. 7)

The program designed in our CTL moves us closer to integrating assessment and improvement of student learning and prompted additional discussion focused on ways to scale these efforts for even more faculty.

The Solution: DEEP

We began the search for a workable solution for delivering faculty development content to faculty with a committee of faculty and administrators who met with the institution's provost. After discussion and research, the group provided overall guidelines for the design of the system, but the final format for faculty development was left to each department. This design allowed for increased emphasis on faculty development and more systematic tracking.

The university, having established faculty development as a fourth component of faculty work (teaching, scholarship, service, and professional development), created a much smaller committee, the Faculty Innovation Workgroup, which was tasked by the provost with developing a response to the report by Academic Impressions' *The State of Professional Development in Higher Education* (Mrig, Fusch, & Kientz, 2016). Through this process, the committee prioritized several recommendations, including efforts to "raise the bar" of what to expect from professional development (p. 3), aligning professional development with departmental objectives, and ensuring that professional development is "planned and deliberate in order to have an impact on department's work" (p. 3).

In the Academic Impressions report, Mrig, Fusch, and Kientz offer an Executive Summary that concluded with a specific charge to CTLs:

> The 2016 operating environment will demand that your staff develop new skills, that your department pilot new initiatives and test new ways of doing their work, and that you grow your institution's knowledge base about these strategic challenges by tapping into expertise, models, and best practices being developed across the industry. (p. 4)

This statement stresses the importance of professional development and need for a strategic approach to coordinating these efforts.

With 38 departments across campus, each of which would go its own way, the Faculty Innovation Workgroup was drawn from a cross-section of campus stakeholders in order to achieve buy-in. The members were:

- the Director of the online learning unit
- the Director of the Women and Gender Studies program
- the Dean of the College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences

- the Vice Provost for diversity
- the Co-Directors of the campus CTL
- the Executive Director of the Noel Studio for Academic Creativity
- the Chair of the Faculty Senate
- the Coordinator of the Faculty Innovators (a group of trained faculty drawn each of the six colleges plus the Library), and
- an online course developer.

After much deliberation and research, the workgroup created DEEP (Developing Excellence in Eastern's Professors), an online series of professional development courses that were offered on our proprietary learning management system, Blackboard. Each course was organized around a four-level progression that followed Bloom's Revised Taxonomy: learner, practitioner, advocate, and scholar. When participants start at the learner level, they are required to read and view relevant materials, write a reflection on them, and propose a plan that integrates the pedagogical materials into a curriculum of taught courses (Bloom's *remembering* and *understanding*). The categories from Bloom's Revised Taxonomy help to ground learning that is taking place within each of the four levels. A level-two practitioner must answer a short quiz, participate in a professional development event (e.g., Teaching & Learning Innovations series, professional learning community, institute, or facilitated department workshop), integrate the course's topic into a classroom-based project, submit the sample plus a reflection that demonstrates student learning, post to a course discussion board, and respond to posts (Bloom's *applying*). At the third level, advocate, participants host an online chat, encourage colleagues to join, facilitate a campus faculty development activity, and moderate a presentation at a conference (Bloom's *analyzing* and *evaluating*). A level-four scholar leads a professional learning community on the course subject and generates a peer-reviewed product for a conference or publication that demonstrates the new knowledge produced increased student learning (Bloom's *creating*).

This system provided several enticements for departments and faculty:

- **Easily Accessible**: While faculty could not always attend regular CTL programming because of course and service scheduling, DEEP was available online 24/7, and it could be accessed from various places ("any face from any space at any pace").
- **Time-Friendly**: Faculty could start a course and pause at any time.

- **Structured**: Each course had four levels, and departments could determine how many levels each faculty member should attain.
- **Assessable**: Each level contained specific goals of both faculty learning outcomes and student learning outcomes that could be measured and reported.
- **Learning-Friendly**: Each course came with an online mentor who provided immediate feedback to the participant.
- **Documentable**: For each course level, the CTL offered badges and a certificate of completion. Faculty could put these accomplishment in their individual annual reports and provide proof of accomplishment.

To determine the courses to be developed, the workgroup surveyed the faculty, which led to a top-ten list of possible subjects. From those, the first six were selected:

1. **Metacognition**: This course was also chosen because of a campus initiative that previous academic year, which eventually led to our QEP 2.0 (second Quality Enhancement Plan, which is required by our accrediting agency).
2. **Foundations of Pedagogy**: This course was selected in part because it could be required of all new full-time and part-time faculty, and it could offer evidence to our accrediting agency of the efficacy of our campus professional development commitment.
3. **Flipping the Classroom**: This course was chosen as the previous year the CTL had run two over-filled PLCs on the subject and saw tremendous interest and promise in this pedagogical innovation.
4. **Discussion Boards**: Since the university was moving more and more toward online classes, this course became a necessity as research had demonstrated this part of an online course was its weakest at the University.
5. **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**: Given that diversity had been established as a major value in the university's strategic plan, this course was a natural to demonstrate the CTL's commitment to that value.
6. **Thinking Critically and Creatively**: The University's QEP 1.0 had focused on critical and creative thinking, and the momentum needed to be maintained.

Each course needed a designer and a mentor. We ended up designing two of the first six courses ourselves as well as mentoring the other four writers. In addition, each designer met with the online course developer in order to translate a script into an actual course, which entails readings, reflections, activities, and scholarly inquiries. Initially, each course mentor was recruited from our workgroup.

To help the faculty see how the courses and our other programming tied together, each time an event such as a PLC or a Teaching & Learning Innovation Series workshop was listed, the CTL placed on the programming's announcement the particular DEEP course that related to the event (e.g., "Demographics of the Typical EKU Student" and the Foundations of Pedagogy course). As of this writing, Assessing Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students and QEP Critical Reading have been added while two more courses wait in the development pipeline.

Of utmost importance is that in this short period our CTL has glimpsed a vision of the Holy Grail in the form of assessment data. As DEEP participants progress through the four levels, they develop a project based on their new knowledge, reflect upon that material, teach that material to peers and students, and provide assessment data that demonstrates student learning. These activities, artifacts generated from the course related to teaching and learning, are compiled by the participant in conjunction with the course mentor. The CTL is then able to collect data focused on the activities, artifacts, and reflections from all the courses and course levels in which the faculty are enrolled to show significant impact upon student learning. Less than a year into the rollout of our DEEP system, our CTL has accumulated evidence of student learning that is a direct result of our professional development efforts. Table 1 lists each DEEP course (including our two latest additions, Assessing Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students and QEP Critical Reading) as well as the level and the prompt that tries to connect what the instructor has learned from a particular DEEP course with student learning.

Table 1
DEEP Course Learning by Level and Prompt

Course	Level	Prompt
Assessing Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students	2.1 Classroom-Based Project	Provide evidence of implementation resulted in student learning (e.g.,

		student work, student survey, classroom assessments, outside observer) of one or more of your course SLOs.
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	2.1 Classroom-Based Project	In a statement of 200-250 words, provide evidence of implementation of a concept from "Addressing Diversity in Schools" resulted in student learning (e.g., student work, student survey, classroom assessments, outside observer) of one or more of your course SLOs.
Discussion Boards	2.1 DB Implementation in Distance Learning	Following implementation, provide evidence resulted in student learning (e.g., student work, student survey, classroom assessments, outside observer) of one or more of your course SLOs.
Flipping the Classroom	2.1 Classroom-Based Project	Provide evidence of student learning (e.g., student work, student survey, classroom assessments, outside observer) of one or more of your course SLOs.
Foundations of Pedagogy	2.1 Classroom-Based Project	Provide evidence of implementation resulted in student learning (e.g., student work, student survey, classroom assessments, outside observer) of one or more of your course SLOs.
Metacognition	2.1 Classroom-Based Project	Provide evidence resulted in student learning (e.g., student work, student survey, classroom assessments, outside observer) of one or more of your course SLOs.
QEP Critical Reading	2.1 Report: Professional Learning Communities	Write a 150-250 word summary that provides evidence (e.g., student work, survey of students) of the metacognitive strategies you taught resulting in student learning.
Thinking Critically and Creatively	Complete L2 Activity: Time to Reflect…	Most importantly, supply evidence that your students demonstrated learning of critical and creative thinking (e.g., student work, student survey).

So far, even though DEEP is still in its infancy, we have begun to collect evidence of student learning resulting from faculty learning in DEEP courses. For instance, in taking our DEEP course on Metacognition, Faculty Member A—from the humanities—wrote the following reflection:

> I did a thinking-aloud activity in my "Introduction to Graduate Studies" class, and it worked well both on one level as a lesson for them as my students and on another level to get them thinking about what pedagogical strategies they might use in their own classes as present and future teachers (as many of them will be). . . . First, I read and annotated a section from a somewhat difficult text in composition theory (Bartholomae's "Inventing the University"), scanned it and then pulled it up on the projector. . . . I used the Think-Aloud strategies to exemplify my thinking as I read it, stopping to explain my notes and annotations. We discussed what strategies I used, and they very adeptly noted all the things I hoped they would see. . . . I then asked them to annotate another page of the reading themselves, first alone, then comparing in pairs before we discussed what they did and what worked for them as a group. . . . Several of them discussed how useful it felt to them to be able to discuss not just the piece of the article itself but how they had approached it.
>
> –Faculty Member A, "Metacognition" 2.1

Having been taught the metacognitive strategy of think-aloud, Faculty Member A then utilized it in her class instruction, discovering that several students found the strategy "useful." In short, students believed their learning increased because the new strategy Faculty Member A had employed.

Faculty Member B—also from the humanities—found the DEEP course of metacognition a useful tool for increased student learning. Faculty Member B is a tenure-track assistant professor in the process of honing her engaging teaching skills while also learning about the students she's teaching in her faculty role. Her reflection indicates that from the moment she took the DEEP course, she began applying her new knowledge and not just thinking about how to use it, but how to assess it:

> I measure the effect on student learning by looking at students' next papers and their attention to comments on previous paper; I also look at student portfolios at the end of the semester and note their

> attention to my comments on their papers as evidenced by later papers. –Faculty Member B, "Metacognition" 2.1

Another glimmer of the Grail is provided by Faculty Member C, from the health sciences, who in a response within our Discussion Boards course for level 2.1, offered the following evidence of student learning, claiming that "though she had not been involved with an ethical dilemma she was able to discuss a potential solution that could lead to dilemmas." The student's response, in other words, evidenced that she was able to transfer what she had learned in the course to other events. This experience allows Faculty Member C to reflect on a pedagogical scenario related to framing.

After learning about framing discussions from the DEEP course, ethical and emotional, the instructor made the change in how discussions are framed on discussion boards and received the following from Student 1 in a subsequent discussion:

> I would say that I have not had a true ethical dilemma while in my facility, but I will say that working in the NICU with the infants has made me have to think more about ethics and ethical dilemma. Many of the infants in the NICU that I see are born addicted to various drugs; whether it be suboxone, oxycodone, or even Neurontin. It was really hard for me at first, to see that most of these infants eventually go back home with their birth mothers. It was difficult to educate these mothers on what their children need after d/c. but ethically I know I have to be a professional and give the best care to these infants. The emotional aspect of the job is more than I think we were warned about.
>
> –Student 1, from Faculty Member C, "Discussion Boards" 2.1

This experience suggests a change in faculty learning that increases student learning. Student 2 in Faculty Member C's course likewise learned from the instructor's DEEP experience to frame dilemmas:

> One dilemma I encountered involved reaching the required face to face contact and time allotted to document notes. There was confusion with the number of minutes to see clients and what remaining time could be used to write notes. I helped resolve these issues by

> researching the policies and also making phone calls to find the correct explanation for my clinical supervisor.
>
> –Student 2, from Faculty Member C, "Discussion Boards" 2.1

The experience described by Student 2 suggests deep learning, resulting from the attention to the way in which the dilemma was framed.

The DEEP system—administered through our CTL—provides a framework for faculty at all levels and stages of the faculty lifecycle to learn deeply about pedagogical topics of importance related to advancement of the university. In the system, faculty reflection is intentional and connected to the experiences of teaching in the classroom.

Conclusion

Even though DEEP is still young and currently offering only glimmers of the Grail, as more participants reach levels 2-4, the greater will be the evidence of a three-way connection among faculty development, faculty learning, and student learning. DEEP appears to be the breakthrough for which faculty developers have long quested, especially in its ability to begin to capture the CTL-faculty learner-student learner dynamic. Moreover, DEEP allows for widespread access while also scaling faculty and student learning. Focusing on improved learning by reaching faculty first and then students, DEEP's configuration encourages learning across disciplines and scholarly goals.

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