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Special Feature: Documenting and Assessing the Work of the CTL

Todd Zakrajsek

Dr. Todd Zakrajsek began his career as an adjunct professor, teaching at a small private college, a technical school, and distance education classes. Securing a tenure-track position at a small regional college in the Pacific Northwest in the fall of 1994, Todd started a center for teaching and learning in his third year there. For his efforts he received a budget of $50 his first year. The next year it went to $5,000 and a one-course release. In year three, the budget was $20,000 with additional release time. While there, he was promoted to associate professor and tenured, partly for his campus-wide faculty development work. In 2001, Todd resigned tenure to take a position as the founding director of a center for teaching and learning at a research university in the Midwest. With a staff of himself and an office professional, he began to develop resources for a campus with approximately 650 full-time faculty members. In 2003, the faculty development center he was leading was merged with the learning technologies group, and Todd was asked to be the director of the combined office. About this time, he also served as Co-PI on a Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) grant to provide resources to distance and adjunct faculty. In 2008, Todd resigned his job as faculty development director to accept a position as the Executive Director of a large research extensive university in the South. He was successful in assisting with the transformation from a long-standing and successful teaching center into a center providing support in teaching, research, and leadership. There, he was responsible for hiring six positions and managed a budget of $1.2 million. In 2012, Todd began working in the School of Medicine at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, as an Associate Professor in the Department of Family Medicine and also in the Academy of Educators to assist in building resources for faculty in the School of Medicine.

Given Todd's extensive experience in faculty development for over 20 years in a variety of types of institutions, regions, and faculty served, we have asked him to write a series on essential issues needed by directors of faculty development efforts. This series is designed to suggest areas for faculty developers to consider along with tips and techniques Todd has

found to be helpful along the way. In this issue, Todd focuses on assessing and documenting faculty development efforts. Possible future topics will include bringing outside experts to campus and strategic planning. If there is a topic you would like to see covered, contact JCTL's Coeditor-in-Chief at tassonjp@miamioh.edu.

Introduction

Outcome assessment has been a critical aspect of education since the early 1990s. Accrediting bodies now routinely expect to see assessment of academic programs and documentation of effectiveness of learning opportunities for our students. That said, assessment should not be done simply because it is required, as a meaningless task being completed because the accrediting agency demand it be done. Assessment is important for the information it holds and the value it can bring to allocating the precious resources of time and money, both for our colleges and for our students. Effective programs of assessment help us to know where on campus to build, where to hold steady, and where to cut. The same is true for faculty development. We put a great deal of effort into the programs we offer, the resources we make available, and the services we provide. It is imperative to know which should be expanded, which should be left as designed, and which should be scrapped. Overall, the process of data collection and assessment takes time. Assessment should not be considered an additional task that we do because it is asked of us, but rather an integral part of what we do on a daily basis to inform our decisions in so many ways.

Making Time for Data Collection and Program Assessment

Everyone I know who is in charge of faculty development feels overwhelmed. To me, that feeling comes from three critical components associated with those who typically oversee teaching center directors: talent, commitment, and an ill-defined position. Teaching center directors are talented individuals, capable of doing many things. Directors are also typically individuals who care a great deal about their institutions, their colleagues, and the students. At the same time, faculty development itself is very poorly defined. The field of faculty development is only about 60 years old, which makes it a relatively recent addition to higher education. In addition, faculty development did not emerge with a clear definition of what it entails, and

many administrators are uncertain as to what a center can do. Recently, in a collaborative project, the American Council on Education (ACE) and the Professional Organizational Developers Network (POD) developed a matrix to help benchmark effective faculty development efforts (https://podnetwork.org/center-for-teaching-and-learning-matrix/). Even with the aid of this matrix, expected outcomes for teaching centers vary widely from campus to campus.

Dropped into an ill-defined task, talented individuals who are deeply committed to higher education are destined to find themselves in overworked situations. That said, it is our responsibility to define our profession, capabilities for our centers given resources and personnel, and the extent to which what we do is effective. Documenting and assessing the efforts of the center is a critical task that is integral to the success of the teaching center. It is not something to be done if there is time, but rather something that time must be made to do.

The more you document and assess programs the easier it will become. Collect data and artifacts that demonstrate what has been done and serve as guides forward. The best way forward is through repetition and consistency. The process of "automaticity" develops in humans through repetition. The more frequently something is done, the more easily the neurons along that pathway fire, and the easier the task becomes. This is how habits develop. The goal of the following pages is to suggest ways to think about assessment and methods to collect necessary information for your teaching center. It is through repetition that these efforts will become second nature, and after a while require less and less time to complete. With the reduced cognitive effort in collecting basic information, more thought can be allocated to increasingly sophisticated data gathering techniques.

When Does a Task End?

First, it is important to rethink the concept of assessment not as an add on but rather as an integral part of the task. In thinking of differentiating an add on versus a part of the job, look at faculty offices when you walk down the hall. You are certain to note some offices are very neat and well organized, whereas others are disheveled with piles of papers and books. In the increasingly digital age the physical stacks on table and chairs are often replaced by icon laden computers with files strewn about on the screen in no particular order. The result is the same in that some faculty have well orga-

nized and filed material, and other faculty members have materials stored in a more organic matter.

I have come to believe that the variability of office organization is heavily dependent on the concept of "when a task ends." For example, when preparing for class, an instructor may pull resource material, read through the information, summarize the information, and fashion it into notes or a PowerPoint presentation. When comfortable that the presentation or course outline is complete, the task is deemed finished by this individual and the final product is ready to be delivered in class. A different individual may take the same steps, but then, when the class presentation is finished, this person proceeds to organize and file (either digitally or physically) the resource material accumulated. Once the material has be filed, the task is then deemed completed. Yet another person may complete the presentation, file the information, and then at the end of the class session use a classroom assessment technique or some other method to determine the extent to which students had learned, having data ready to make adjustments the next time the material is taught. For this last person, the task is not completed until data has been gathered as to the success in achieving the desired outcomes. Done repeatedly, each of these three individuals develop habits that result in different end states. The first person will have a disorganized mass of resource material and no course outcome data. The second faculty member will have a well-organized office or computer, but still no outcome data. The third faculty member will have a well-organized office or computer and outcome data. Note again the concept of "when the task is deemed completed." If a department chair asked all faculty members to collect outcome data, the first and second faculty members might note they do not have time for this extra task. The third faculty member would already have the data and not consider this collection of information an extra task. For this third person collecting the outcome assessment data is part of the task.

If data collection is considered a step within the process of completing a task, the time necessary to collect that information is planned right along with all other aspects of the task or project. As noted previously, as data collection is repeated it will become easier and increasingly free up time that may be allocated to other tasks. As a related example, new course preps take a tremendous amount of time, and the more a course is taught the easier teaching that content becomes. The same is true of collecting data to document and assess faculty development efforts.

Collect Data as You Go—Reflect as Needed

At times, collecting outcome data is quick and easy to do. If not collected at the time, going back and finding this same data from months prior is typically time consuming, if it is even possible. In the past, you have likely noted that if you write down a full citation for a reference at the time you are writing a paper it takes only about 30 seconds to a minute to write out the citation. If you jot down only a name and date as you write it may easily take 5 minutes to find the reference and then write out the citation a few days later. The amount of time to type the citation will be the same in both cases, immediate versus days later. The amount of time you spend relocating the full citation is wasted time. The same is true of assessment data. Collecting it in real time is essentially the time it takes to collect the data. Months later going back to get the data will result in wasted time. As a result, it is always best to collect data as soon as possible and avoid the need to go back at a later time (e.g, for an annual report) to find the necessary data.

Ask for (or Hire) Assistance

Although with practice data collection becomes easier and faster, it does certainly still require time. You do not need to be the one to do all of the data collection. Much data and information needed to document and assess faculty development efforts can be collected by a student worker or administrative assistant. For example, if you desire to know the actual attendance at events (as compared to the number registered), desire photos to document the event, and wish to review evaluations, ask an administrative assistant to always take photos, count attendance at the midpoint of the event, and distribute paper session evaluations.

Depending on how the data collection is structured, over time the individual assisting you will know how and when to collect the information you desire and very little of your time or effort will be needed. This will allow you to focus your time on interpreting and reporting the data.

Types of Data to Collect

The type of data you collect will depend on a number of factors. One important consideration is to develop and periodically review an assessment

plan. This plan is best based on the goals and mission of your teaching center, which supports the goals and mission of your institution. Assessment plans based on missions will be more focused and most likely result in the kinds of information that will best serve the college.

Participation Data. The easiest data to collect is simply the number of individuals who attend and event, access a resource online, or meet with someone in the CTL. If faculty preregister for an event, keep track of the number who indicate they are coming, the number who actually show up, and the number who remain in attendance at the end of the event. It is helpful to also note the department of the faculty member and their rank (e.g, adjunct, assistant, associate, full). At times, it is very helpful to be able to tell a department chair or dean the number of faculty utilizing center resources or attending center events. One of the easiest methods to collect this data is to set up an Excel form with names in row and events in columns. This allows you to note how many faculty members interact with your CTL repeatedly and also which events or resources are most popular.

Participation data gives you a sense of which offerings are most popular, by which department, and which type of faculty member. Collecting numbers at the beginning and end of a session will give an indication of the extent to which the topic is popular (number at start of a session) and whether it is delivered well (number at the end of the session).

Satisfaction Data. Participation will provide an indication of interest in a topic, but it does not indicate perceived value of the resource or event as it was delivered. Online surveys may be sent out after an event, but my experience has been that those result in very low response rates. I still use short paper evaluation forms that are provided to attendees upon arrival. I can get demographic information from sign-up sheets, so those items I typically do not ask on surveys, although one could certainly ask one or two questions if they are of particular interest (e.g., academic rank, years teaching, primary reason for attending). Evaluations of events may be very short or quite extensive, and be comprised of open-ended, close-ended, or mixed items. I typically ask only a few questions: (1) What did you find most helpful about this session; (2) What would have made the session even better for you; (3) How would you rate this session on the following scale: 1 = Not helpful, 2 = Somewhat Helpful, 3 = Very Helpful. If you are in need of assistance in developing a session evaluation form, perform a quick web search for "session evaluation." The world of training and development has many options that may be easily adapted.

It is also possible to ask about satisfaction of feedback from a classroom observation, meetings with CTL staff, resources available on the web, and anything else you offer. If you have little experience in collecting this type of information check with individuals on campus with satisfaction surveys. Often you will find such people in departments of psychology, business, music, and art.

Learning Data. It is often desirable to determine the extent to which individuals benefitted from participation in an event, a consultation, or from a resource. This data may be collected through a pre-post form given at the beginning of an event and then at the end. Another method is to ask at the end of an event for participants to note the extent to which they learned new information. One concern to note is that asking a person to indicate if they perceive they have learned does not confirm that learning actually happened. One option is to ask individuals at the end of an event to briefly note any new information they learned. The difference between asking if something was learned versus what was learned is subtle, but important. At the end of a workshop on "Fast and Effective Methods to Grade Papers," a faculty member could be asked, "To what extent did you learn new methods to grade papers?" or asked, "What did you learn in this workshop that you did not know previously?" Although open-ended questions take a bit more time to read, for a workshop with 30 participants, it would take only a few minutes to read all of the responses. This type of information also provides a much richer summary of what participants actually gained from the experience.

It is possible to also ask learning and growth questions online for web resources and through short forms following consultations. Overall, the goal here is to determine the extent to which something was learned. If your goal is to teach something, it is important to know if something was learned. Keep in mind this is very similar to what we to do with students in the classroom regularly, which provides some very good clues as to the ways this information may be gathered.

Implementation Data. When considering the type of information to collect, it is important to keep in mind that individuals may participate, enjoy the experience, learn something, and yet not change their teaching strategies. Behavioral change is always a challenge, as those in psychology regularly note. Even if a person voices preference for a changed behavior, actual implementation is a challenge. Many New Year's resolutions are abandoned within the first few weeks of January.

When it comes to teaching and learning, it is desirable to determine the extent to which your efforts result in new teaching strategies. This data may be gathered relatively quickly from faculty members, provided you ask in a way that does not take much time to respond. One option is to send a short email approximately two weeks after the workshop and thank the faculty member for participating and then ask one very short question, "Have you implemented any aspect of the workshop on 'Fast and Effective Strategies to Grade Papers'? If so, please describe in one or two sentences what you have implemented." The idea here is to keep the work of the faculty member in providing you information at a minimum. This will help with response rates. This type of information can also be gathered for web resources, consultations, book groups, faculty learning communities, and classroom visits/discussions.

In collecting implementation data, you may ask faculty members for permission to visit their classes following workshop to see how information is implemented. Many centers fail to collect implementation data as it is perceived to be difficult to obtain. There are a host of creative ways to gather this information and it may take a bit of time to collect, it is extremely valuable in assessing the extent to which your efforts are leading to instructional changes.

Impact Data. Impact is the most challenging data to collect and very few faculty development centers gather this information (Beach, et al., 2016). The primary question under consideration for impact data is, "If changes have been made, did the new strategies, information, or concepts result in a better outcome." For example, following participation in a workshop on grading, does it take less time to grade, are students writing better subsequent papers, or is it possible to assign more challenging papers due to reduced grading time? As with any type of evaluation data, it takes a bit of time and energy, but if done regularly and the faculty members see that the data is taken seriously and used to advance your efforts they will provide the needed information. One method to collect this information is simply to ask faculty members the rather ambiguous question, "Have you noticed any improvement in student outcomes or other positive results as a result of implementation of the ideas from the 'Fast and Effective Strategies to Grade Papers'?" If you ask a question such as this four to six weeks after a workshop or journal club meeting, faculty may well provide information you had not previously considered. You can also ask faculty members what data they have to support their statements, which can become the foundation for a potential scholarship of teaching and learning project in future semesters.

Impact data may be gained through course observation, from student comments, or perhaps even course evaluations. Overall, impact does take a bit more time and energy to both identify and then collect the data. That said, these are also the most important data and hold the possibility for important changes at the institution. These data may also serve as a foundation for additional funding requests for your CTL, especially if your efforts are aligned with the campus mission and vision. After all, what could be more important than data actually showing the impact your efforts have on the campus?

Logistical Information. In addition to information collected to assess the outcomes of center efforts on teaching and learning, it is important to collect data and information that you can use within your center to help improve future efforts. This information is particularly valuable when collected over a period of time, as trends will become apparent. For example, when sending out emails informing faculty members of an upcoming event or a new online resource, if it is possible to determine whether the emails are opened, note which day of the week and time of day results in the best response. Over 20 years ago at a very small CTL at Southern Oregon State University, we had a system that allowed me to see when emails were opened and even if they were put into trash or saved. I noted quickly that emails sent early on Monday were thrown away more quickly than emails sent on Tuesday. My hypothesis was that emails that amassed over the weekend were quickly read on Monday and that it was best that my messages about the CTL not be included in that backlog. Tracking information on the number of times social media is read, liked, and forwarded may provide important information about the time of day and days of the week that information and photos relevant to the CTL should be posted.

At Central Michigan University, I started to take photos of the food remaining following a workshop. I simply noted the number of people who preregistered for the workshop, the number who showed up, and the name of the caterer. After everyone had gone through the line and secured their food, I took a photo of the remaining food and printed out the photo. This allowed me to note on the photo data that helped me to determine average attendance rates and which caterers provided the most food. There were times I ordered food for 30 and with 25 attending we ran out of food. For other caterers, I ordered food for 25 with 30 faculty members attending, and yet much food was left over. The best outcome of keeping registration and attendance numbers was that I learned quickly what percentage of faculty were likely to show up for an event, based on factors such as time of the

semester, day of the week, and even the weather. This data is critical in making decisions such as how much food to order and from which caterer. If the workshop is on a Monday and the typical attendance for a Monday workshop is 60%, then having 70 preregistrations allows me to order food for 42 from a caterer who tends to provide large quantities of food and be sure there will be plenty to eat. This saves valuable resource as uneaten food is not only a sad waste, it also depletes a budget unnecessarily. If, given this Monday workshop example, 28 lunches are not ordered that would have been wasted (at $15.00 per person), that is over $400 in savings, which is enough saved funds to cover the cost of a book group for 10 faculty members.

Additional logistical information to collect may include the amount of money spent on an event in terms of staff time, printing, and giveaways. I often calculate the amount it costs per person to host an event. Combined with the outcome data noted previously, a sense of costs per prerson is helpful in program planning. You may find that book groups cost an average of $75 per participant and results in strong impact data and that a website video resource costs an average of $5 per person and demonstrates reasonable satisfaction scores. Given the cost and outcomes, you may well be able to justify both types of deliverables. This will allow for ensuring that higher cost offerings are justified through deeper and meaningful outcomes. If that is not the case, it may be important to either reduce the cost of development, increase the number of faculty using the resource, or eliminate the offering.

Collect and keep generated material pertaining to each event. Far too many faculty developers deliver programs and resources without considering how information may be reused and what data would help with future decisions. Keep a compendium of promotional flyers, emails, and evaluation instruments. If these are kept in one place it is easy to look back through them and select elements that seem to work and eliminate those that do not. If evaluations are changed keep each form in a book so that the various evaluations forms used may be reviewed quickly in the future. It is a total waste of time to make changes and then later forget why changes are made and end up right back with earlier versions.

Preparing and Sharing the Data

In collecting data, it is helpful to keep the intended audience in mind: keep in mind for whom the information will be valuable, whether this audience be upper administration, other campus or outside entities, your own CTL, or even yourself. If you do not have an audience in mind, it is often best

not to collect the data. There is a great deal of survey fatigue, and it is important that faculty respond when you need information. Over the years, I have regularly found that if I collect data with no specific use in mind the data never seems to be used. That said, there are many potential uses of information collected regarding services, resources, and events delivered by a teaching center. Logistical information collected for the center staff may overlap with, or be completely independent from, information collected to provide to the provost.

As noted previously, it is beneficial develop an evaluation plan in the summer prior to the start of the academic year and, if you have a team, to discuss both the data collection you have in mind and why you would like the data collected. Information collected may be vital to an accreditation visit, to departments in recruiting new faculty, or even admissions in recruiting students. The team, if you have one, will have additional ideas for collecting information and also be more invested in that data being collected.

Staff. Collect and then periodically include data in staff meetings. Share the data with your group, note how much work they are doing, and highlight the impact they are having on campus. When needed, including cost per faculty member for services and resources will help the group understand why certain areas get more attention and perhaps why someone's pet project may need to be discontinued. It is much easier to show the group that an event everyone likes must be discontinued if it is very expensive per person and results in very little significant outcomes. The overall goal here is to analyze data and information as a team to provide for continuous improvement and also to celebrate what you have accomplished. Team members love to see impact data and know they are helping to advance the institution.

There is not always a team in the teaching center. I worked for several years in a solo CTL. In hindsight, I realize I did not spend enough time going over data to make strategic decisions and to remind myself of the impact I was having. When I next run a faculty development center on my own at a relatively small institution, which I hope to do again one day, I will collect data and go over it regularly.

Provost or other supervisor. Most faculty development center directors will be asked to provide an annual report. The better the data, the better position to ask for additional resources, such as personnel and budgets. Deans, provosts, and other administrators are tasked with ensuring that university resources are allocated in ways that have the best impact on the institution. Data is extremely important and sharing data in colorful graphs within concise reports is amazingly impactful. I recall sharing data with the president

at Central Michigan University one semester specifically as I had heard him say to someone that the teaching center I ran was very important to new faculty members. He was particularly taken by one graph I included in a report to him that showed that approximately one-third of those attending workshops were full professors. He seemed also very impressed by the number of different departments for which I had done department-based short workshops. I would always strive to determine the type of data he needed or desired, and then get that data into his hands.

It is helpful to create an executive summary of individual events and email it to the provost or to whomever you report. My executive summaries were typically two pages so they could be printed on a single piece of paper front and back. For my report, I included the title of the workshop, the abstract, three outcomes, the name and department of the facilitator, day and time of the workshop, a summary of evaluation data collected, and one or two photos from the event (the photos are an important component). In addition to workshops, summaries may be written to reflect book groups, faculty learning communities, webinars, or any other gathering of faculty. These summaries are also extremely helpful in completing the final annual teaching center report.

Department Chairs and Deans. Chairs and deans can be strong allies in faculty development efforts and also depend heavily on data in many aspects of their roles on campus. The executive summaries noted above may also be sent to chairs and deans, particularly when their faculty serve as facilitators for your events. Other data that is extremely helpful for chairs and deans are "fact sheets" that may be shared with potential faculty member hires. A short document of a single piece of paper containing the types of events, resources, and services provided by the teaching center, along with some key data, can be an important recruiting tool. Faculty coming to a campus are often unfamiliar with the offerings of a CTL. Having a quick fact sheet may even help prompt a department to include you or your center in their campus tour.

SoTL. Another potential use for data is to consider possible scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) projects. As data is collected and analyzed, always be looking for ways that faculty members from different departments might work together to complete SoTL projects. Data at the implementation and impact levels are particularly noteworthy.

Conclusion

Documenting the work of your teaching center and collecting program assessment data is an important component of leading faculty development work. Data collection is best considered a step in the process, rather than an additional task that must be done in addition to other work. Amassing the right kind of data for the right audience may be a bit scary at first, but collection is a process that gets easier and easier the more it is completed. The data gathered will take many different forms and may be presented to a variety of audiences and is totally worth the effort. Given a well-developed assessment plan and careful reporting, the data collected pertaining to the offerings of the teaching center are vital to making informed decisions that will best move your teaching center forward.

References

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