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Engage the Sages: A Model for Offering Professional Development to Faculty and Graduate Students in Teaching

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Even at large, state research universities, teaching is the institution's core mission. Accordingly, we designed, publicized, and offered a professional development series to enhance the teaching skills and excellence of our faculty and graduate students at our large, state research university. Our professional development series consisted of 18 voluntary events, seminars, and workshops over the course of the academic year. Participants who completed a specified number of event surveys and an overall reflection earned a professional development certificate in teaching. Data indicated that our series was personally valuable to our participants, and they believed it promoted teaching at our university.

Introduction

It is often the case that faculty are not trained to teach. Having terminal degrees in their academic disciplines is often assumed to qualify them to be effective instructors of the content in their disciplines (Stevens, 1988), but there is little evidence to suggest that instructors' degree levels are linked to enhanced student learning (e.g., Goldhaber, 2002). Instead, effectiveness (and ideally excellence) in teaching is a product of the application of sound, evidence-based pedagogical techniques, not just the mastery of content knowledge (De Courcy, 2015; Gunn & Fisk, 2013; Wood & Su, 2017). Fortunately, however, effectiveness in teaching can be learned and improved with effort (e.g., Lowenthal, 2008; O'Loughlin et al., 2017). Our goal was to create a professional development series to promote teaching at a large, state research university that would provide training opportunities across a breadth of topics to enhance our participants' teaching effectiveness.

Large research universities, unsurprisingly, emphasize research productivity for many of their faculty and, as a result, may deemphasize teaching effectiveness (e.g., Price & Cotten, 2006). This focus may cause administrators and search committees to prioritize research productivity and potential over teaching experience and effectiveness in making hiring decisions, perhaps resulting in faculty having to teach without experience and training that would

enhance their ability to do so well. Faculty, even those without research expectations, face challenges navigating the zero-sum game that requires them to devote their finite time and effort judiciously across their responsibilities (e.g., research, teaching, service, advising, administration; Buller, 2009). Emphasis on research productivity over teaching effectiveness is a factor in tenure and promotion decisions, with more weight typically being placed on research productivity, with teaching being assessed only in terms of competence and “an absence of disastrous teaching” (Price & Cotten, 2006, p. 7). Accordingly, faculty may have little time, energy, or motivation to engage in professional development to enhance their teaching. Our goal was to provide a professional development series to enhance teaching that was valuable, realistic, and convenient. We believe our professional development series could be a model for faculty development at other colleges and universities whose faculty are similarly challenged by their competing responsibilities.

Previous Faculty Development in Teaching Efforts

Our university is a large, land-grant research institution with more than 1,400 full-time faculty, 22,000 total students, 250 academic undergraduate majors and programs, and 165 graduate degrees and certificates (Kansas State University). Our efforts to promote teaching excellence are important for faculty, graduate students, and staff. While the research mission is central at our R1 institution, we have a substantial number of individuals who are dedicated to enhancing their (and their students’) classroom experiences (e.g., instructors for our First-Year Experience [FYE] program; for more information, see Priest et al., 2016; Saucier et al., in press; Saucier & Martens, 2015). As further evidence of their dedication to teaching excellence, many of these individuals have expressed a desire to participate in and contribute to professional development opportunities to enhance their teaching and that of their colleagues. We also have a number of faculty, graduate students, and staff who are less experienced, comfortable, and/or successful in their teaching who have expressed a desire to receive training and experiences to help them become better teachers.

As such, our Teaching and Learning Center (TLC) plans and publicly promotes various professional development events in order to meet the desires of and to share the experiences of our dedicated teachers, as well as to provide teaching-related help to those who need it the most. For example, for two academic years (2017-2018 and 2018-2019), we offered the opportunity for cohorts of faculty, staff, administrators, and graduate students to take the Course in Effective Teaching Practices by ACUE (Association of College and University Educators). We used this online course as the foundation for a voluntary year-long hybrid professional development experience that included face-to-face sessions for cohorts of approximately 30 participants guided by pairs of faculty facilitators who were selected for their achievements in teach-

ing and research. The experience provided comprehensive coverage of teaching topics, ranging from designing courses, to creating productive learning environments, to using active learning techniques, to promoting higher-order thinking, to using assessment to enhance both learning and instruction. Our participants reported positive experiences, including having increased confidence in their teaching efficacy and learned new evidence-based teaching techniques; and students had better experiences in the courses they took with these participants than in other courses they took at our university (Eiselein, Saucier, & Macharaschwili, 2019).

Unfortunately, this hybrid professional development experience presented challenges that interfered with our ability to offer it to future cohorts. First, the experience was work- and time-intensive in that participants completed 25 online modules along with in-person sessions over an entire academic year. Second, there was financial cost, both to purchase access to the course and to compensate facilitators. While we had extramural grant support to help cover these costs for two years, we could not fund the experience internally beyond that. These challenges inspired us to rethink our professional development efforts to enhance teaching at our university.

Our Model for Faculty Development in Teaching

We, as part of our university's Teaching & Learning Center (TLC), developed a revised model for professional development in teaching that we offered to faculty, staff, and graduate students. We capitalized on local talent by identifying individuals at our university who could offer valuable insights about specific topics related to teaching, many of whom are well-known on our campus for their research *and* teaching endeavors. We invited individuals to present in our professional development series over the course of the 2019-2020 academic year, and virtually everyone we invited accepted our invitation. We selected presenters to cover a broad spectrum of teaching topics, albeit less scaffolding and comprehensive than the intensive coverage the ACUE course provided. We selected our topics to have broad appeal for individuals teaching across academic disciplines, lower and higher levels of the curriculum, classes of various sizes, and different instructional modalities. Our topics ranged from crafting one's teaching persona (our opening event), to teaching online, to bringing energy and enthusiasm to the classroom, to using PowerPoint well, to maximizing the utility of class discussion. We designated several presentations as "Need to Know" events that we expected would have universal appeal for all teachers on topics including teaching first-generation students, diversity and inclusion in teaching, accessibility, dealing with student issues and concerns, and assessment of student learning. Table 1 includes the names of all events offered in our professional development (PD) series for a glimpse of the types and breadth of our events and a better sense of our curriculum.

We also frequently coordinated with different, specialized offices at our

institution in order to better facilitate more intensive and focused conversations relevant to student learning. For example, we worked with our institution's Office of Student Life (i.e., an office that actively works to support students who are struggling and/or in crisis) to provide our participants with more information about how to help students who need additional support. We also coordinated with our institution's Global Campus (i.e., an academic college at our institution that is focused on providing excellent distance education options) to provide our participants with the skills they need to be excellent online educators. Similarly, we also worked with our campus' *First-Year Experience* (FYE) office to provide our participants with the information and tools they need to be able to engage and support first-generation college students. We offered each event in a face-to-face session for 50 to 90 minutes, depending on the presenters' needs, and used Zoom to allow participants to engage in the session online synchronously. We archived the Zoom recordings on a webpage in the Canvas learning management system. Attendees, as well as other members of our university who requested it, were invited to this Canvas page to access the recordings at their convenience.

Promotion of Our Professional Development Series

We promoted our series via short YouTube videos in which presenters described their event and its takeaways. These promotional videos were short (generally less than two minutes) and provided face-to-face connections with presenters that we hoped would humanize them and engage our potential audience in their topic (e.g., the promotional video for the opening presentation on the teaching persona: <https://youtu.be/v-aGpJ8mKOW>). To help our presenters create their videos, and to more effectively promote our events to the appropriate audiences, we asked our presenters to follow a general template when recording their promotional materials. More specifically, we asked each of our presenters to self-record a video that (a) introduced themselves, (b) provided a general overview of what they would be talking about, (c) highlighted the key points and/or skill participants would take away from the event, and (d) a brief discussion on the presenter's target audience (e.g., instructors interested in getting students more engaged). Further, in an attempt to simultaneously build our TLC's brand and connect our presenters with our audience members, we asked each presenter to close their promotional video with the following phrase, "I'm [name], and I teach at K-State." We posted announcements of event details, including links to register and access the Zoom link, along with promotional videos on our TLC social media (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) and webpage, and in our biweekly campus newsletter. Our numbers of views for these promotional videos indicated they had some reach to our potential audience (see Table 1).

Certificate and Fellow Requirements

To incentivize participation in this professional development series, we offered a TLC Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) Professional Development Certificate and a TLC Faculty Professional Development Certificate. These certificates (and Fellow status—see below) provided a tangible method of demonstrating our participants' commitment to enhancing their teaching excellence. These could be included on our participants' CVs; in their applications for jobs and awards as part of their materials demonstrating their teaching excellence; and/or in their tenure, promotion, and yearly review materials. GTAs were eligible to earn their certificates by attending and completing post-event surveys for approximately ten events (events longer than the typical 50- to 90-minute length counted as more than one event). GTAs also completed a peer observation of a colleague's teaching and reported their perceptions of the teacher's style, interactions with students, success in achieving objectives, pedagogical practices, etc.

Faculty and staff were eligible to earn certificates by attending and completing post-event surveys for approximately twelve events, with four of the events designated as "Need to Know" events. After attending the events and completing the post-event surveys, faculty completed an application for the certificate that included an overall reflection about how the information they learned enhanced their teaching or teaching potential (e.g., "What are three teaching strategies you learned about in this professional development series that you could potentially implement into your classes?"). We also provided an opportunity for faculty to apply for TLC Fellow status. We reasoned that professional development can be pursued with the intention of improving one's own teaching but also could be pursued with the intention of improving others' teaching. We wanted to encourage and recognize these efforts by naming TLC Fellows. To apply for Fellow status, faculty completed the requirements for our TLC Faculty Professional Development Certificate and also completed a Fellow application in which they summarized their past and current efforts to improve teaching and learning at our university and beyond. Applicants also provided an abstract of no more than 250 words that described a workshop or presentation they would offer in the next year's professional development series.

Table 1
Attendance at and Ratings of Events in Our Professional Development Series

Event Name	Number of Promotional Views	Number of Online Event Views	Number of In-Person Participants	Post Event Surveys Completed by In-Person Participants	Post Event Surveys Completed by Remote Participants	Valuable	Promoted Teaching
<i>The Teaching Persona</i>	161	N/A	111	60	14	8.03 (1.15)	8.26 (1.16)
<i>Baking Accessibility into Your Course+</i>	63	64	26	22	8	7.77 (1.31)	8.13 (1.17)
<i>What is CliftonStrengths?</i>	178	28	17	11	6	7.63 (1.54)	8.13 (1.03)
<i>Experiential Learning in the Classroom</i>	46	63	34	27	15	7.55 (1.47)	7.90 (1.23)
<i>The K-State Family: How we Follow Through on the Promise of Support</i>	57	46	17	8	9	8.06 (0.97)	8.29 (0.77)
<i>How to Teach Multidisciplinary Content Through Historical Narratives</i>	25	39	10	7	12	7.21 (1.72)	7.63 (1.71)

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<i>Engaging Students with Experiential Teaching Tools for the Humanities</i>	N/A	54	15	7	7	7.64 (1.69)	8.21 (1.05)
<i>Remembering our Histories and Building Relationships Across Human Difference+</i>	N/A	28	23	14	9	7.00 (1.78)	7.48 (1.50)
<i>Engaging and Supporting First-Generation Students+</i>	133	122	26	15	7	8.00 (1.38)	8.05 (1.29)
<i>Bringing Energy and Enthusiasm to the Classroom</i>	24	66	23	20	4	8.04 (1.16)	8.17 (1.13)
<i>Teaching in an Online Environment</i>	23	68	13	13	12	7.12 (2.01)	7.68 (1.82)
<i>Effective Pedagogy and Student Anxiety+</i>	64	8	27	11	3	8.21 (1.19)	8.00 (1.30)
<i>Dealing with Student Issues and Concerns+</i>	12	48	15	14	9	7.74 (1.57)	7.83 (1.56)

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<i>Bring Your "A" Game: Leveling Up Class Discussion</i>	35	32	31	22	6	7.46 (1.58)	7.81 (1.10)
<i>The Point of Power- Point is to Use All Its Power</i>	111	28	31	15	9	7.38 (1.58)	7.83 (1.20)
<i>Faculty Exchange in Teaching Excellence</i>	N/A	N/A	112*	11	N/A	7.64 (1.03)	8.27 (0.65)
<i>Assessing Undergraduate Learning Outcomes (Critical Thinking, Communication, Diversity)+</i>	30	30	14	6	10	6.93 (1.34)	7.60 (1.30)
<i>SPOTLIGHT K-State</i>	N/A	N/A	115*	11	5	8.33 (0.82)	8.47 (0.83)
Overall Totals	962	724	433	294	145	N/A	N/A
Mean (SD) per Event	68.71 (54.73)	48.27 (26.97)	27.07 (23.54)	16.33 (12.34)	8.53 (3.36)	7.68 (1.44)	8.00 (1.26)

* For our *Faculty Exchange in Teaching Excellence* and *SPOTLIGHT K-State* events, attendance is based on the number of people who preregistered for these events.

+ Indicates events designated as "Need to Know."

Event Attendance

We tracked event attendance using hardcopy sign-in sheets at our events. We also tracked the number of event views online. The former measure of attendance is not perfectly accurate because not all participants who attended the events signed in, particularly if they arrived late or left early and missed our reminders to do so. The latter measure also is not perfectly accurate because it is possible individual participants viewed the same event online more than once or that multiple participants viewed the event online together. Accordingly, these data should not be interpreted as precise, but approximate trends in our attendance, and likely underestimate the reach of our events. Those caveats aside, as shown in Table 1, we had good attendance at our events. For our general TLC Professional Development events, an average of approximately 30 people attended each event in person, and an average of approximately 47 people viewed each event online. In particular, events designed to have broader appeal to teachers of various academic disciplines and at various stages of their career attracted larger in-person audiences. These events included those designed to help teachers develop their teaching persona (i.e., “The Teaching Persona”; $N = 111$), discuss the importance of experiential learning in the classroom (i.e., “Experiential Learning in the Classroom”; $N = 34$), and introduce strategies to enhance in-class discussions (i.e., “Bring Your ‘A’ Game: Leveling Up Class Discussion”; $N = 31$). Further, our “Need to Know” events had good attendance, which was gratifying given our emphasis on them in our professional development certificate requirements. More specifically, each of our “Need to Know” events had an average of approximately 22 people attend in-person, and approximately 50 people view online.

Quantitative Post-Event Survey Data

After each event, participants who signed in at the event or participated synchronously over Zoom were emailed a post-event survey created in Qualtrics for the event. Participants who watched the events asynchronously on our Canvas page could access the post-event surveys on Canvas to complete. The post-event surveys were brief. The participants reported how “personally valuable” as well as how “valuable for promoting teaching” they believed each event was using 1 (“Not at all valuable”) to 9 (“Very valuable”) response scales. Participants could also complete open-response items to assess (a) the three most important points they took away from a given event, (b) something about their teaching, mentoring, advising, etc., they will do differently (or continue to do) because of a given event, and (c) recommendations for future professional development events. We note that not all individuals who attended or watched events completed post-event surveys, and our data are limited to those who did. As shown in Table 1, our participants reported very positive perceptions of the events, with each event receiving a mean perception rating above 6.9 as personally valuable and above 7.4 as valuable for promoting teaching. The mean values

for all events combined indicated participants reported they were highly personally valuable ($M = 7.68$; $SD = 1.44$) as well as valuable for promoting teaching ($M = 8.00$; $SD = 1.26$).

Qualitative Post-Event Survey Data

In the post-event surveys after each event our participants commented on the specific takeaways they learned from the events and concrete ways that they would apply those takeaways in their current and future teaching. Given the specificity of those comments to each particular event, we will not report these responses in detail here. However, the wealth of these concrete takeaways and applications to their teaching suggests that our participants found our events valuable and improved their actual teaching as a result.

Qualitative Certificate Responses

As further evidence of our PD series being valuable, realistic, and convenient, we explored our faculty participants' qualitative responses in their applications for certificates or Fellowship.¹ In particular, our participants highlighted the value of our series' versatility in terms of the breadth of topics we offered and specific teaching tips that were shared. For example, one of our participants mentioned that "Even though we teach such different courses and content, a lot of the same tricks can be easily adapted and used in different classrooms." Similarly, the applicability of our series is particularly important because of the diverse disciplines and duties among our faculty. This applicability is best exemplified by another participant who noted that, "We all have different appointments and responsibilities within our different job functions, and not all of us are focused only on teaching." The inclusivity and versatility in our series allows us to provide professional support across our university to faculty, instructors, and graduate students who are dedicated to improving their teaching practices.

In particular, participants described several benefits of our PD series, including the timeliness of events and the practical suggestions our series consistently offered. For example, one participant noted: "Amusingly, it seemed like every session I attended or watched addressed something that I had made a mistake on in the week prior. This provided a painful look in the mirror, but also gave me an opportunity to double back and correct my approach." Similarly, we were also mindful and intentional about scheduling Just-In-Time events (i.e., events that provide specific information when it is especially relevant and important to our participants; e.g., "Effective Pedagogy and Student Anxiety" toward the end of the semester) so participants could promptly apply new strategies to their teaching and best serve their students. Accordingly, other participants noted

¹ It is possible there may be some self-selection bias in the following responses given that these applicants likely saw the inherent value of our series because they were applying for our certificate or Fellowship. However, such participants are also qualified to comment on the series given that they participated in at least ten events.

that they acquired longer-term teaching strategies (e.g., “a more student-centric mindset,” practical ways to avoid burnout reignited the “spark back into [their] teaching,”) and knowledge (e.g., “resources on-campus,”). These faculty responses provide further evidence that our PD series was valuable to instructors and provided them with benefits and strategies that could be incorporated immediately and/or throughout their teaching careers.

Additionally, throughout the academic year, the series benefitted from colleagues sharing information with one another as a community of learners, with one participant noting, “The energy and passion shared in these sessions has a tendency to rub off on others which helps inspire and remind us (me) about why I choose to teach.” Further, our series also allowed for the exchange of ideas and practices by providing the opportunity for our participants to see “how faculty from other colleges and departments are engaging and teaching their students,” as one participant noted. For many of our faculty participants, our PD series offered opportunities to network with colleagues across campus, many of whom they may not typically interact with in their day-to-day schedules. These networking opportunities helped establish a sense of community among our participants, thereby enabling them to support each other personally and professionally. For instance, one faculty participant shared, “The most important thing I learned from the TLC Professional Development Series is that I don’t have to figure it all out myself. I don’t have to struggle solo.... I can tap into the TLC development series—as well as the featured speakers and other colleagues—for guidance, advice, innovation, and successful teaching practices.” We believe our commitment to building and fostering connections amongst faculty members in our PD series has contributed to an academic culture in which peer support and collaboration is respected, valued, and even celebrated.

Certificates Completed and Fellows Named

While attendance at our events was substantial and the participants reported very positive perceptions of our events, we believe the numbers of certificates completed and Fellows named were underestimates of the success of our professional development series. The COVID-19 global pandemic caused our university to move all operations to remote modalities midway through our spring semester. This created multiple obstacles for our professional development series. First, presenters who had planned face-to-face events would have had to adapt their presentations to online deliveries on short notice. Second, the move to remote teaching, with little warning and often little previous experience teaching online, along with having to work from home with their families (and perhaps having to suddenly home school children) may have burdened our already busy faculty and graduate students such that participating in our professional development series may have become difficult and a lower priority. These obstacles resulted in our being unable to offer several planned events, and likely resulted in participants who intended to earn professional development certificates or apply for Fellow status being unable to do so. In all, 16 GTAs and six

faculty earned our TLC Professional Development Certificates, two of which additionally earned TLC Fellow status.

Lessons Learned

One of the first lessons we learned from offering our professional development series was that, even at a large research university, there is desire and need for professional development in teaching. To paraphrase the famous quote from the movie *Field of Dreams*, if you offer professional development in teaching, and if you incentivize participation, then faculty and GTAs will come. We learned that offering a breadth of opportunities across the academic year was effective, as was offering the events in-person and via Zoom synchronously, and archiving recordings of the events for asynchronous access. We learned events that appeared discipline-specific may be less well-attended, but were perceived as valuable by those who attended. We learned our professional development series should be flexible to current needs and circumstances, and our upcoming series will focus more on topics including teaching in online/remote modalities and understanding trauma-informed pedagogy. Finally, we learned that, despite our promotional efforts, some members of our university community were unaware of our professional development offerings and opportunities. In the future, we will consider other creative ways to publicize our professional development series (e.g., direct communication with deans, department heads, and program coordinators).

Conclusion

We created a model for faculty and graduate student professional development in teaching that can be widely adapted to colleges and universities to enhance teaching excellence at their institutions. Our professional development series consisted of contributions of local excellent teachers, which allowed participants in our series to not only learn from accomplished colleagues, but to expand their teaching network and community. Our professional development series was low cost, with very little expenditures required given our presenters donated their time because they care about the teaching climate at our university. Our certificate and fellow incentives were also low cost, but provided meaningful returns on the investment of our participants in terms of their demonstrated efforts in improving their own (and, in the case of our fellows, others') teaching. These incentives may help with promotion and tenure pursuits for faculty as well as increasing the employability of graduate students. By naming Fellows, we also provided low cost but meaningful recognition for teachers and helped them promote their campus presence through their pedagogical perspectives by including them in the next year's professional development series. Overall, we believe our professional development model for enhancing teaching was successful in providing meaningful information, networking opportunities, and documentation of faculty's and GTAs' professional development activities in

teaching. This success is important because teaching is the core mission of any university, even a large research institution.

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