

Cooperative Approaches to Faculty Development

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Community colleges must address the negative effects of rapidly advancing technology and diminishing resources on teaching performance. Industrial technology is changing so rapidly that faculty find it difficult to stay abreast of developments. College equipment may become outmoded within a few years. Opportunities for teachers to have practical experience with state-of-the-art technology are limited. One result is a hiatus between occupational instruction and the demands of the workplace.

Reduced numbers of full-time students, the curtailment of public funds, and inflation have had a negative impact on teaching in almost all programs. Once able to move from one college to another or grow professionally through participation in conferences and in-service workshops, faculty now find opportunities severely limited. This situation is alarming, because if faculty cannot find ways to regenerate themselves, their teaching may become routine and spiritless.

Faced with more part-time students and diminishing resources, community colleges have hired more part-time staff.¹ While part-time faculty enhance flexibility for coping with sudden shifts in enrollment, they have earned fewer graduate degrees or credits and have less teaching experience than full-time instructors.² Professional development activities must be found to improve their teaching effectiveness.

As technology threatens to outdate the skills of many faculty and as full- and part-time faculty seek opportunities for professional development, the financial condition of colleges militates against traditional approaches. Community college educators worry that overall quality of instruction will deteriorate if effective approaches to faculty development are not found. This article proposes three approaches to professional development—all of which seem promising if faculty and administrators are willing to explore cooperative arrangements.

Cooperative Agreements with Business and Industry

Local industry and occupational instructors could enter into agreements between local employers and the college. Under cooperative arrangements, instructors from occupational areas affected by changing technology could be employed by industry for approximately four weeks in the summer. Specific goals and objectives must be identified jointly by the college and the employer.

Following the completion of the initial work period, each participating faculty member might spend another month updating course materials and work with colleagues to bring them up to date on technological developments.

A college administrator must make contacts with industry and arrange work agreements. If the college already has a cooperative educational program for students, the same coordinator might arrange these agreements. Ideally, each participant would be paid at the same rate as for a summer teaching assignment. Since the cooperating industries enjoy substantial benefits from students who are trained in college programs, they might be willing to pay for part of the instructors' contract.

In most cases, summer seems the most appropriate time for cooperative arrangements with business and industry. Many instructors can be relieved of classroom responsibilities in the summer, and businesses often look for replacements during vacation periods. Under some circumstances, though, a semester or an academic year might be preferred.

There are several benefits of such a program. The faculty member becomes acquainted with the latest technology and has an opportunity to gain professional enrichment. Students benefit from an improved curriculum and a revitalized instructor. The college benefits from an updated occupational program. Industry benefits from a better trained pool of employees, as cooperation and communication improve community and college relationships. As K. Patricia Cross observed, "Hard as it may be to do, establishing mutually supportive partnerships with industry seems to be an essential task on the new frontier."³

Paired Arrangements with Faculty at Nearby Community Colleges

But what of those faculty in academic programs who need revitalization but find only limited options within their institution? Our second proposal calls for cooperative arrangements between faculty at nearby community colleges, within or between districts. In such a plan, instructors from the same discipline would be paired for a semester of shared professional development.

Representatives are selected on neighboring campuses to generate interest. Before meeting, each institutional representative might obtain and circulate background information on those who indicate interest: participant's teaching field and educational background,

courses ordinarily taught, and areas of interest related to professional development. During an exploratory meeting, faculty could mingle informally to explore their mutual interests and compatibility. They could list preferences for partners, and campus representatives could coordinate the pairings in the period following the meeting.

Once individuals have been notified of their pairings, they should meet and develop a plan: professional development goals, specific means of meeting those goals, resource needs, and a timetable for the semester. The plan should be reviewed by campus representatives who could lend assistance if bottlenecks develop during the term.

A criticism of professional development efforts is that they are often one-time events that generate initial enthusiasms which drops off because there is no follow-up. Yet newly acquired knowledge can be incorporated into teaching behavior if consultive support is provided through the paired teams and a coordinator. The plan must be built around institutional support of staff initiative. The strategy behind the plan is to help it flourish by supporting and encouraging those who are interested.⁴ One attractive quality of a plan is the flexibility to study an area of individual interest, rather than one imposed by the college.

If the coordinators are administrators, the cost of their time can be budgeted along with their other administrative duties. If faculty members are responsible for coordination, adjustment can be made in their teaching schedules.

Paired Arrangements Between Faculty

Programs for professional development have seldom included part-time personnel. Many part-time faculty have no background in pedagogy, little understanding of the unique qualities of the community college and little understanding of the needs of its students.⁵ As their number continues to grow, it is crucial that part-time faculty be included in development efforts.

This plan requires the cooperation of the college's master teachers. These professors, usually well-known on the campus, share their expertise with a part-time teacher. During the first division meeting of the academic year, professional development could be introduced to both full- and part-time faculty. Later, each division chairperson would make pairings after considering the master teachers' and part-time instructors' choices for a compatible partner.

Once pairs have been identified, the participants should develop a joint plan. The division chairperson should review the plan at its inception, and the team members and chairperson should evaluate it at the end of the semester, making suggestions for improvement. Throughout the term, the full-time professor must help in development of syllabi, construction of tests, and use of learning materials. The master teacher must provide both modeling and feedback to the part-time instructor concerning teaching effectiveness. The part-time instructor might read and report on a topic of mutual interest to the two.

Responsibility must be assigned for making the contacts, selling the idea, developing a mutually agreeable plan with those involved, and monitoring the development activities. Evaluation should occur both informally and formally, including discussions about what is or is not occurring.

A Plea for Cooperative Efforts

Colleges with financial problems often defer maintenance on buildings. Glen Bucher suggested that a parallel exists with "deferred maintenance on college faculty."⁶ Deferred maintenance on buildings is not nearly as serious as the neglect of pedagogical resources, which ultimately must affect creative teaching. The three approaches suggested here, all requiring commitment on the part of the faculty and administrators, suggest how a cooperative approach can help revitalize both community college instructors and instruction.

References

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- ³K. Patricia Cross, "Partnerships with Business," *AAHE Bulletin*, Washington, D.C.: American Association of Higher Education, 33 (8) (April 1981), p. 5.
- ⁴For further information on the use of this strategy, see Robert W. Frederick, Jr., "Confluent Education: Corning Community College," in S. V. Martorana and Eileen Kuhns, *Managing Academic Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1975), pp. 118-123.
- ⁵J. O. Hammons and T. H. S. Wallace, "Sixteen Ways to Kill a College Faculty Development Program," *Educational Technology* XVI (12) (December 1976), pp. 16-20.
- ⁶Glenn R. Bucher, "Deferring Maintenance on a College Faculty," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 27, 1981, p. 21.

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