A Collaborative Approach to Creating Faculty Development Opportunities in Universities with Multiple Campuses

Amy Berke, Provost Fellow 2018 – 2019

Faculty development is an important element of faculty life in a university setting. SACSCOC Comprehensive Standard 3.7.3 states, "The institution provides evidence of ongoing professional development of faculty as teachers, scholars and practitioners." The University System of Georgia requires that its institutions offer a "professional growth and development program" to "cultivate and sustain a culture in which faculty professional development is valued and pervasive" (BoR Policy Manual 8.3.13). Middle Georgia State University's Strategic Plan (2018-2023), Imperative 3, states that "The University will attract, develop, retain, and recognize talented faculty and staff who are committed to fulfilling its mission." Clearly, the development of faculty is a priority in USG institutions and in higher education in general; however, a significant investment is required in building new or redeveloping existing faculty development centers. Associated costs to scale services to a large faculty population can be significant. In an era of declining resources, state universities are struggling to provide cost-effective faculty development opportunities, especially at institutions with multiple campuses.

Middle Georgia State University began the process of building a CETL a few years ago, and the early version of the CETL's staff structure included a director and several instructional designers. The staff provided instructional design services for creating online sections of courses, and later disseminated information about faculty development opportunities across the state and offered some faculty development workshops related to teaching and learning on MGA's multiple campuses. In fall 2018, a faculty task force was formed, and the members were asked to examine ways in which faculty could be more directly involved in strengthening faculty development services and offering input into faculty development programming. The CETL Faculty Task Force published a Vision Paper in fall 2018 which offered the following vision statement with recommendations for a more robust faculty development program with stronger faculty involvement:

> Recognizing MGA's Faculty as an invaluable institutional resource requiring continuous support for growth and development, the CETL Faculty Task Force endorses an expanded vision of professional development at MGA and recommends that faculty development strategic initiatives at MGA should
>
> - Re-establish and strengthen the collaborative, leadership role of faculty in professional development programming and delivery.
> - Create Faculty development programming that serves faculty across their professional lifespan and that covers the spectrum of faculty competencies with a focus on teaching and scholarship.
> - Foster collegiate culture and build faculty engagement within the institution and across the wider community.

- Create a baseline of professional quality, while promoting and celebrating excellence. (*CETL Faculty Task Force Vision Paper)*

In line with these recommendations, two Faculty Development days were organized during the 2018 – 2019 academic year, one held in Macon and one in Cochran. Invited faculty and staff presented on topics such as "The Boyer Model of Scholarship," "Momentum Year," "Tenure and Promotion Portfolio Design," "Value Added: MGA Librarians Embedded in Your Online Classroom," "Documenting Teaching Excellence," "Fostering and Documenting Engagement in Online Classes," and "Assessment Care Team: How and When to Refer Students of Concern." The sessions were well-attended, and faculty consistently noted that the sessions were useful and that more opportunities for faculty development – as well as collegial gatherings across disciplines and campuses – would be very beneficial. Specifically, faculty members noted the need for these kinds of regular development sessions, including sessions designed specifically for new and early-career faculty.

In 2019, after the reorganization of academic units into redefined Schools, resources were also reorganized to support the structure of the Schools. CETL, for example, was de-centralized, and instructional designers were re-assigned to each School to support faculty and programs. While the availability of instructional designers in each school will be integral to the success of course development, other faculty development opportunities of the kind envisioned by the Faculty Task Force may need to be reconsidered within the institution's new academic organization.

Universities across the country have faced pressures in terms of offering faculty development opportunities with limited resources, especially those with multiple campuses. Milton D. Cox, Director of the Center for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning at Miami University and Editor in Chief of the *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, has advocated for a kind of faculty development model based on student learning communities. Working from theories developed in the late 1970s, Cox applies the structure of student learning communities to the creation of "faculty learning communities." He concludes that "One of the important collaborative structures in higher education established during the last 35 years is the faculty learning community" ("Four Positions of Leadership" 85). Cox notes that a "faculty learning community" (FLC) is "not a committee, task force, course, book club, or action learning set […] An FLC is a small-group learning structure with a process that enables its participants to investigate and provide solutions for any significant problem or opportunity in higher education" ("Four Positions of Leadership" 87). Cox notes that while such communities may be sponsored by faculty development centers, FLC's can emerge organically or can be facilitated by an interested faculty member. In other words, FLC's can be a strong component of faculty development without significant cost.

Cox distinguishes FLC's from "Communities of Practice" (CoPs), a term that originated in higher education practices in Australia. While the formations of both kinds of communities are similar, there are some differences in terms of how each community functions. Some theorists see the FLC as a specific kind of Community of Practice, which

is unique to addressing issues of teaching and learning in an academic setting. Cox focuses on the FLC as a preferred model, one that he has developed and written about extensively. Cox defines the specific structure of a faculty learning community as a group of "cross-disciplinary faculty and staff of 6 to 15 members who engage in a collaborative, active year-long program with a curriculum about enhancing teaching and learning and with frequent seminars and activities that provide learning, development, the scholarship of teaching, and community building" ("Introduction" 8). Cox notes that the group can be cohort-based (members who already identify as a group) or topic-based (members who gather because of interest in the topic). Cox suggests that the group "select a focus course or project" to work on and that the group consider "presenting the results to the campus or at a conference" ("Introduction" 8). Cox notes that some of the most effective FLC's are multidisciplinary in nature and may involve faculty, students, staff from Student Affairs, librarians, and others ("Four Positions of Leadership" 94).

Gary Shulman writes about the challenges that leaders of institutions face in "devising an implementation strategy that pulls people toward voluntary FLC acceptance" (45). He continues: "it is easier to implement a change with people than a change to people." Shulman says that "in confronting the challenges of constant change [in higher education] and the need for enhanced teaching and learning, there is no substitute for FLC collaboration—people choosing to come together for a common purpose and willing to support one another so that all can progress" (45). As Cox and Shulman both note, attention should be directed to the development of "community" and "community-building" in an FLC, where the group, in a less structed gathering than a committee or project team, can engage in a larger social context, developing trust and empathy among members, in order to address the work at hand.

If faculty can be convinced of the merits of participating in an FLC, the next question is, "who will lead the FLC, and what kind of leadership will this be?" Martha Petrone and Leslie Ortquist-Ahrens have suggested that the term "facilitator" rather than "leader" should be used for the person organizing an FLC. They propose the following:

> FLC's require the same team-building guidance as any other work group. In the course of a semester or academic year, the FLC facilitator will function in a nonlinear way in three main roles—champion, coordinator, and energizer. However, unlike the goal of a traditional group leader, the ultimate goal of a facilitator is not to maintain the leadership position but to help move the members of the FLC to the point where they gradually assume these three roles themselves. (64)

Petrone and Ortquist-Ahrens call for the creation of "a safe environment for the honest engagement of ideas and feelings" in terms of establishing an FLC. Members of the FLC must value the work at hand, trust one another, and feel at liberty to express themselves. There must be strong interpersonal skills at play to maintain the sense of community. As with students in a student learning community, faculty in an FLC may need to "move outside of their comfort zones and into the realm of intellectual and interpersonal connections" (68). To analyze a problem in depth and find a solution (such

as revising a course to enhance student learning), the community of faculty must be willing to bend, to listen, and to change. Petrone and Orquist-Ahrens note that "through this process, teaching and learning are meaningfully enhanced and often transformed" (68).

Norman Vaughan has written about the challenges of establishing FLC's in era where time is a luxury for many faculty members. Nevertheless, he notes the need for collaborative sharing with both early-career and experienced faculty. He analyzes the specific need for early career-faculty to participate in a community where they can grow, connect, and thrive. He observes that "early-career faculty want to pursue their work in communities where collaboration is respected and encouraged, where friendships develop between colleagues within and across departments, and where there is time and opportunity for interaction and talk about ideas, one's work, and the institution" (101). Vaughan notes that "the major challenge of sustaining such communities is always one of time… Increased teaching and research commitments leave new and experienced faculty with limited time for face-to-face professional development opportunities. The question then arises, can technology be used to create more flexible and accessible learning communities for faculty?" (101).

Vaughan analyzes a pilot study where an FLC used technology in a blended learning setting (composed of some face-to-face interaction and some interaction through technology, using online discussions, for example). Vaughan notes that "the data indicated that the ongoing face-to-face sessions allowed personal relationships and a sense of community to develop. This, in turn, fostered the sharing of ideas and experiences among the participants" (105). Vaughan also observed that "several faculty members stated that they found communication in the face-to-face sessions to be less systematic, more exploratory, and less attentive to the perspective of others than computer-mediated communication" (105). However, the participants, overall, were "very eager to attend the face-to-face sessions but less willing to engage in the online learning activities." In spite of participants pointing to the merits of online communication, "post-study interviews revealed that some of the reasons for this reticence in the online environment were a lack of familiarity with online communication, the lower value placed on this form of communication, electronic communication overload, and the option to delay communication until the face-to-face sessions" (105). The results of the pilot study provided both positive and negative results regarding the use of technology to support an FLC.

Michael Paskevicius and Kathleen Bortolin have written about a pilot FLC at Vancouver Island University, a teaching-focused university where faculty teach on a 4/ 4 load (or sometimes higher). The University is also spread across three physical campuses and two research sites, and faculty typically teach on more than one campus every term (606). The FLC was developed using "a combination of face-to-face and online methods. Participants from a range of disciplines met at regular intervals throughout the year. Between the face-to-face meetings, participants engaged in online activities such as discussions, collaborative writing, and peer review activities" (605) related to teaching and learning. Paskevicious and Bortolin noted some success with this blended learning

model, especially since faculty, pressed for time and traveling frequently, were not prepared to commit to regularly scheduled face-to-face meetings. This study found some positive results in an FLC that was structured in a blended learning setting.

Janet Resop Reilly et al., have written about successful results in using technology to support a collaborative faculty development activity at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay across five campuses. Reilly and her colleagues became interested in the collaborative faculty development model, and chose to develop a "community of practice," a term they preferred over FLC. Like those who have developed FLC's, Reilly and her colleagues noted that the CoP "can be more cost effective and efficient and can facilitate deeper learning among faculty" (99, 102). Like the FLC, the Community of Practice (CoP) as defined by Reilly is "a group of people who share an interest in a domain of human endeavor and engage in a process of collective learning that creates bonds between them" (102). Reilly notes that "a CoP may operate formally or informally and may be cohort or issue focused," as can the FLC. Reilly observes that "a CoP may be within a single institution (the most common type), a multi-institution setting, or on a global scale" (102).

Reilly reports that the CoP was developed with a grant for a group of nursing faculty on five campuses who taught online. The project took place over five years with a focus on introducing new technologies to the faculty to improve course delivery and student learning. Faculty who participated in the CoP were already familiar with technology and were receptive to using an online platform for their faculty development activities. The CoP, supported by technology, allowed for communication across multiple campuses. The group used the D2L platform to create courses that contained resources for the group (including text sources, videoconferences, recorded conferences, photographs, assignments, webliographies, and archived scholarly articles). In their case, the group's faculty development "courses" were supported by the Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning office at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. Additionally, the Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning developed an "interactive website for online instructors and instructional designers to explore e-learning issues" (107).

The work of the CoP at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay took place primarily online. The online "courses," however, were not just repositories for instructional materials for faculty. Reilly notes that "best practices of faculty development for instructional technology suggest that the focus be pedagogy, and not simply technology skill acquisition" (102). Faculty development programs, she notes, should include social and professional dialogue and be based on instructor work and experiences in the classroom" (102). Attempting to duplicate the richness of face-to-face collaboration, "the faculty development structure included monthly videoconferences among [faculty], annual face-to-face conferences, campus leadership, and participation in [the] online [D2L] courses." Reilly also notes that "relevant and challenging assignments and [faculty] collaboration and interaction were encouraged in reflective discussions, both online and during videoconferences" (102). At the end of the five-year CoP, Reilly notes that there were challenges and successes. Cost became an issue with the model the group

proposed. The program proceeded only with a grant which allowed the CoP organizers to develop the necessary resources and opportunities for a five-year plan. Additionally, faculty still were pressed for time to engage in the activities, even though most of the activities were conducted online. Successes were reported in the strengthening of the online courses, especially with the introduction of new technology to enhance learning.

As Middle Georgia State University moves forward in the coming years, faculty development will be an important component of the structure of the University. There are no easy solutions to developing robust faculty development opportunities in a cost-effective manner across multiple campuses. However, in the new School-based structure, perhaps Faculty Learning Communities, either in face-to-face, blended learning, or online settings, may offer one possible solution in offering faculty development opportunities of the kind outlined by the CETL Faculty Task Force. Either within Schools or across Schools, on a single campus or across multiple campuses, the Faculty Learning Community model could "foster collegiate culture and build faculty engagement within the institution and across the wider community," addressing one of the most important recommendations offered by the Faculty Task Force last year.

Works Cited

CETL Faculty Task Force, *CETL Faculty Task Force Vision Paper,* Middle Georgia State University, 2018.

Cox, Milton D. "Four Positions of Leadership in Planning, Implementing, and Sustaining Faculty Learning Community Programs." *New Directions for Teaching & Learning*, vol. 2016, no. 148, Winter 2016, pp. 85–96. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1002/tl.20212.

---. "Introduction to Faculty Learning Communities." *New Directions for Teaching & Learning,* vol. 2004, no. 97, Winter 2004, pp. 5-23.

Paskevicius, Michael, and Kathleen Bortolin. "Blending Our Practice: Using Online and Face-to-Face Methods to Sustain Community among Faculty in an Extended Length Professional Development Program." *Innovations in Education & Teaching International*, vol. 53, no. 6, Dec. 2016, pp. 605–615. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1080/14703297.2015.1095646.

Petrone, Martha C., and Leslie Ortquist-Ahrens. "Facilitating Faculty Learning Communities: A Compact Guide to Creating Change and Inspiring Community." *New Directions for Teaching & Learning*, vol. 2004, no. 97, Spring 2004, pp. 63–69. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1002/tl.133

Reilly, Janet Resop, Christine L. Vandenhouten, et al. "Faculty Development for E-
Learning: A Multi-Campus Community of Practice (CoP) Approach." *Journal of
Asynchronous Learning Network*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2012, pp. 99 - 110. doi:
10.24059/olj.v16i2.249

Shulman, Gary M., et al. "Institutional Considerations in Developing a Faculty Learning
Community Program." *New Directions for Teaching & Learning*, vol. 2004, no.
97, Spring 2004, pp. 41–49. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1002/tl.131.

Vaughan, Norman. "Technology in Support of Faculty Learning Communities." *New
Directions for Teaching & Learning*, vol. 2004, no. 97, Spring 2004, pp. 101–109.
EBSCOhost, doi:10.1002/tl.137.